CANELO-CRAWFORD SUPERFIGHT SPECIAL EDITION

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No Ropes, No Gloves, No Lag: stc's group and EWC 2025

League of Legends Showdown

There were no gloves, no ropes, and no referee. But inside the stc Esports Arena in Riyadh on July 16, 2025, on the opening day of the League of Legends tournament at the Esports World Cup (EWC), what unfolded carried all the elements of a true fight. When the lights hit the stage and the screens snapped into motion, the only thing missing was the sound of the opening bell.

For Saeed, who had flown in from Dammam for this single day, this wasn't about lights, chants, or showmanship. This was about watching the closest thing to a perfect fight that five digital minds could construct together. He'd followed the reigning champions of the 2024 EWC tournament, T1, for years. He knew the roster, the stats, the signature plays and flanking routes, and he came to see them bring his favorite League of Legends champions — Vi, Jarvan, and Lee Sin — to life. The experience didn't disappoint. What he saw was strategy at its peak, executed by some of the best players in the world.

Each champion played a role that would be instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with a disciplined fight team executing a well-rehearsed plan. Jarvan opened the engagement with Cataclysm, a move that raised a circular wall around opponents, trapping them and forcing a close-range clash. It was textbook ring control. Vi followed with her boxing-inspired style, amplified by massive gauntlets that guaranteed impact at close quarters. Then came Lee Sin, using sharp, martial precision to shut down escape routes with clean, controlled strikes. To Saeed, it felt like watching a flawless set, strike, and finish — executed in perfect sync.

That level of coordination in multiplayer gaming isn't just instinctive; it depends on constant, real-time communication. Riot Games, the creator of League of Legends, introduced Party Voice Chat in 2018 to meet this need, enabling teams to speak directly in-game. At the professional level, this kind of live communication is indispensable — high-stakes matches demand unity. Most engagements begin with a single decisive move, but without instant response from the team, the opportunity can vanish.

Voice chat alone, however, has its limits. Five players communicating at once can quickly turn into a wall of sound. This is where voice aggregation becomes essential — and stc group provides the digital foundation to make it possible. Built into the game's infrastructure, voice aggregation fuses multiple audio streams into one layered and filtered feed. It identifies speakers, prioritizes key commands, suppresses noise, and ensures the right message reaches everyone instantly. The result is a seamless line of direction guiding players through every round.

For that system to work under tournament pressure, the network must be flawless — and stc group is the only telecommunications provider with the infrastructure to meet that demand. Voice aggregation relies on absolute digital stability. The setup behind EWC required more than high speed; it needed to function without delay, jitter, or loss. That's what stc group delivered.

As the Elite and Founding Partner of the Esports World Cup, stc group didn't just power the venue; it enabled the experience. With 27 5G towers across all event zones, including all EWC areas , and over 1,295 antennas as indoor solutions, stc's infrastructure ensured that every millisecond of voice, connectivity, and coordination ran without interruption while supporting thousands of visitors and players simultaneously.

The achievement wasn't just about capacity — it was about consistency. At this level, perfection isn't a luxury; it's a requirement. Every signal had to land exactly when it was needed. One missed packet, and voice aggregation falters. One flicker of latency, and a crucial call comes too late. In a match where fractions of a second decide everything, that kind of disruption can turn a clean engage into a team wipe.

That's why stc group's role went far beyond connectivity. They delivered a digital environment stable enough for everything to run exactly as intended. And while Saeed didn't know the technical specs behind what he was watching, he didn't need to. What he saw — and felt — was the result. That's the thing about great infrastructure: when it works, it disappears. Everything simply happens exactly when it should.

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WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS ...

Unbeaten in 41 fights, a 22-year-old Canelo Alvarez made his main event debut in Las Vegas on September 15, 2012. The opponent was Josesito Lopez, who'd earned the opportunity after upsetting former welterweight titleholder Victor Ortiz three months earlier. Canelo, coming off a one-sided points win over aging great Sugar Shane Mosley, was dazzling in this fight, dropping Lopez three times en route to a brutal fifth-round TKO at the MGM Grand Garden Arena. The fight with Terence Crawford will mark the 18th time Canelo has headlined in Las Vegas. RING

Josh Hadges

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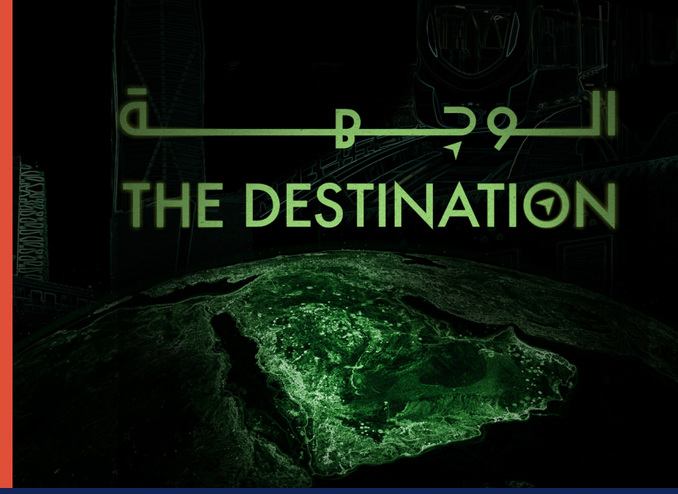
The Destination:

A cinematic reflection of Saudi Arabia's transformation



For decades, Saudi Arabia has been viewed through an outside lens, its rich cultural fabric and ambitious vision often overshadowed by outdated perceptions. Today, a new narrative is unfolding - one of rapid transformation, economic diversity and cultural resurgence. At the heart of this shift is the Kingdom's emerging film industry, shaping how Saudi Arabia tells its story to the world.

A documentary chronicle of change Produced by Konoz under the Ministry of Media, The Destination is a documentary exploring Saudi Arabia's recent transformations. Through immersive storytelling, the film captures Saudi Arabia's remarkable progress in the past years, spanning economic growth, cultural advancements, sporting achievements, diplomatic breakthroughs, and technological innovation. More than just a documentary, The Destination is a window into a nation redefining its place on the global stage.

The film showcases Saudi Arabia's emergence as a major global hub, welcoming millions through international events and initiatives. With the 2027 AFC Asian Cup, Expo Riyadh 2030, and the 2034 FIFA World Cup all on the horizon, The Destination highlights its rich heritage and ambition.

Blending archival footage, exclusive interviews, with insights from policymakers, industry leaders, and cultural figures, The Destination presents a compelling narrative of a nation on the move - a cinematic reflection of Saudi Vision 2030, not just as an aspiration but as a reality taking shape.

Konoz: Bringing Saudi stories to the world

Konoz is dedicated to telling Saudi Arabia's story through documentaries and animated films that highlight its cultural identity, historical depth, and modern achievements. At the forefront of the Kingdom's burgeoning film industry, Konoz is reshaping perceptions and amplifying the Kingdom's voice on the global stage.

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COME OUT WRITING

Ahead of the Canelo Alvarez vs. Terence Crawford megafight for the undisputed super middleweight championship, we asked readers of The Ring to give their fondest memories from each fighter's career as well as their predictions for what will go down on September 13 in Las Vegas.

Craig Williamson

Crawford reacts to winning his first world title after defeating Ricky Burns.

The first time I got to see Bud Crawford fight live on TV was when he ventured over to Scotland to challenge Ricky Burns for the WBO lightweight title. Crawford was a young fighter at 22-0. He had never fought in this type of environment before. It didn't show. He boxed beautifully and gave Burns a boxing lesson over 12 rounds. I struggled to give the champion two rounds. Right then I knew Crawford was special. When you consider that Ricky went on to capture world honors at 140, Bud's win simply got better with age.

Paul Wickes

I'll always remember the Crawford-Errol Spence Jr. fight. Everyone I knew didn't believe in Crawford pulling it off, but I just had a feeling that he was going to piece him up all night. When Crawford knocked him down the first time, all the blood in my body went straight towards my legs as I literally jumped from my seat in awe. In the coming rounds, I had never been more of a fight fan at that moment. For whatever reason, it just felt like the Earth stopped spinning and tuned in to watch what I was watching. To watch him give the fans a great show and watch him clinically shut down a great fighter like Spence, it truly was an electric night.

Noel Rodriguez

My favorite Canelo inside-the-ring moment was when he defeated Amir Khan in a way that left the boxing world shocked. My favorite Canelo outside-the-ring moment was when he gave an interview inspiring the next generation, telling us, "If you truly want something, it will require immense discipline." He goes on to say, "Find what you love in life." My prediction is a Canelo stoppage in Round 10.

Medina Luv

My favorite Canelo memory is when he fought Floyd Mayweather Jr. Despite being his first-ever superfight and his first loss, the resiliency of him trying to show how great he will be one day against one of the greatest of all time was a sight to behold!

Zach Bolos

I am an aspiring boxer and an even bigger boxing fan. My favorite memory of Canelo is seeing him achieve history against Caleb Plant, and my favorite memory of my favorite fighter, Terence Crawford, is seeing him MAKE history and solidifying his place as a two-time undisputed champion. [The victory over Spence was] the most inspirational moment in boxing I

have ever witnessed, and I hope to achieve similar feats someday. My prediction for Canelo vs. Crawford: I got Crawford by UD. He's just really something else. Not even the great Canelo can break this man.

Edgar Ramirez

My favorite memories of Canelo fights are Canelo hitting the arm of Callum Smith effectively and knocking out Amir Khan with one big shot (I was scared). If Crawford fights recklessly, then he will get knocked out in the second half of the fight, probably in Round 8. If Crawford chooses to fight defensively and not take any chances, then Canelo wins via decision.

Muhammad Usama Talha

Memories I wanna revisit are of Crawford knocking out Andre Gorges. That was a crazy knockout! And Crawford telling Spence everything he was gonna do to him years before the fight even happened! Also Canelo breaking Billy Joe Saunders' orbital bone after all the disrespectful stuff Saunders said in the lead-up to the fight! Nothing like a brutal stoppage to end a grudge match, right?

Moe_Slim

My wife and I had a pandemic wedding in 2020, and as Canadians we couldn't cross the border for our honeymoon until 2021. We chose Las Vegas, and while there we attended concerts and shows, but one of the absolute best moments was attending the Crawford vs. Shawn Porter fight for the WBO welterweight title. My wife didn't understand how big of a fight this was, and I'll never tell her how much I paid for tickets, but the energy was electric, from the entrances to Jimmy Lennon Jr. introducing the fighters to the crazy 10th-round TKO! Looking back at video showing the corner telling Crawford he was down on points and then him turning on the switch and finishing the fight was wild! Crawford by decision on September 13th!

Cory Low

Meeting the man himself on a hot day in Rome on a tour at the Colosseum. Been a fan of Canelo since the early days, but I think this one goes to Crawford. It's a passing of the torch.

Kurt McKee

One of my favorite Canelo moments is his fight against James Kirkland. Kirkland comes in fast-paced, hoping to overwhelm Canelo early on with the high quantity of punches he's throwing while Canelo is against the ropes blocking most of them. Canelo quickly changes the pace of the fight, moving to the center of the ring and landing clean shots, one of which is a straight right hand that ends up knocking down Kirkland. Canelo continues to dominate the fight, knocking Kirkland down again with a right uppercut in Round 3, then ultimately knocking him out with another right in the same round. After the KO, Canelo checks on Kirkland, showing that he is not only a humble and respectful sportsman but a good person overall. This is one of Canelo's fights where his power, technical skills and his ability to win in an exciting fashion prove why he is deserving of the praise and spotlight he continues to receive today.

I predict that Canelo will win this fight via TKO in Round 9. Both are undoubtedly great fighters, but Canelo's power and size will ultimately lead him to victory. I think he can be the first and only person to stop Bud, and I think he can achieve this impressive feat by breaking Bud down slowly with body shots throughout the fight.

Sofia Barraza

My favorite Terence Crawford memory has to be the night he dominated Errol Spence Jr. It wasn't just a win; it was a statement. Easily one of the coldest performances I've ever seen.

One of my favorite Canelo moments was when he stopped Billy Joe Saunders on May 8, 2021. The energy at AT&T Stadium was crazy, and Canelo was locked in from the start – breaking Saunders down round by round. That uppercut in the eighth round was brutal; it shattered Saunders' orbital bone and forced him to retire on the stool. Canelo walked to his corner like he already knew it was over. The way he handled a slick, undefeated fighter like Saunders just reminded everyone why he's one of the best in the game.

I've got Terence Crawford over Canelo because of his overall skill set and versatility. He's just too smart, too quick and too complete.

Charles Mendoza

I have watched Terence Crawford's whole career since it has been on TV – first on HBO Boxing against Breidis Prescott on the Brandon Rios-Mike Alvarado 2 undercard in 2013 and continuing to his first world title win, against Ricky

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COME OUT WRITING

Burns to win the WBO lightweight belt in 2014. And nine years and 16 title fights later – all but two won by knockout – my favorite memory came against Errol Spence Jr. Crawford put on the most impressive performance of his career against his toughest opponent to become the first undisputed champion at welterweight in the four-belt era. He is one of the best fighters I have ever seen.

Johnnie Fox

Favorite Crawford memory: Bud dancing with his mom at Mandalay Bay after stopping Shawn Porter.

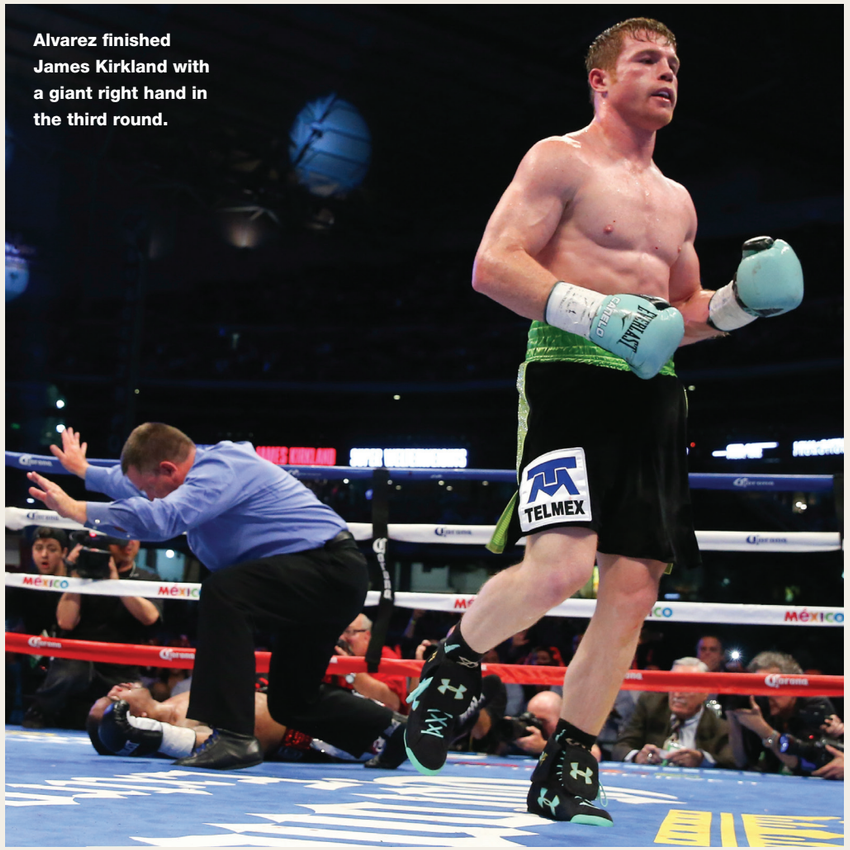
Sam Amaya

I've attended recent matches for both men, and there's something about live fights that lets you share in the energy – you'll never scream at home the way you will while actually being there. I recall Crawford walking to the ring in both the Madrimov and Spence fights. In both cases, Crawford's presence carried the brash confidence of a champion who felt he had finally arrived, and saying to the crowd with a bold look, "Give me the recognition I deserve."

What I felt during the ringwalk for Canelo's match against Munguia was unlike anything I had ever experienced. The arena darkened minus the light of cell phones, the anticipation building as Canelo's highlight reel appeared on the giant screen to energetic Mexican music, and the cheers of a partisan crowd as he entered the ring, waving to the crowd as if he meant to say, "I'm who you came to see. I'm the man."

I've long considered Crawford to be the best boxer since Floyd Mayweather's 2016 retirement, and for all of Canelo's head movement, I see Crawford's superior footwork and timing helping him to bank most of the early rounds. By the time Canelo decides to play catch-up and turn up the heat, I envision Crawford having figured out Canelo's puzzle and holding off the late rally for a close but clear victory.

Thomas Choong



Alvarez finished James Kirkland with a giant right hand in the third round.

My favorite memory of Canelo is when he went face-to-face with Caleb Plant at a press conference and dodged his slap, at the same time countering and slapping him back. Sold the fight well. My favorite memory of Crawford is when he had a face-off with Errol Spence Jr. and somehow Errol knew Bud didn't like hot sauce. Bud was shocked but amused, LOL. My prediction is Canelo via decision!

Fernando Mora-Roman

I have always been an extremely casual boxing fan, and that really meant I tuned in to the big crossover fights. I purchased the big pay-per-views and enjoyed watching Canelo vs. Gennadiy Golovkin and other big events like Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao.

I worked a corporate job during the pandemic and did so remotely during much of 2020. To entertain myself during this time, I started watching old YouTube videos of famous fights while also searching out boxing

Ed Mulholland

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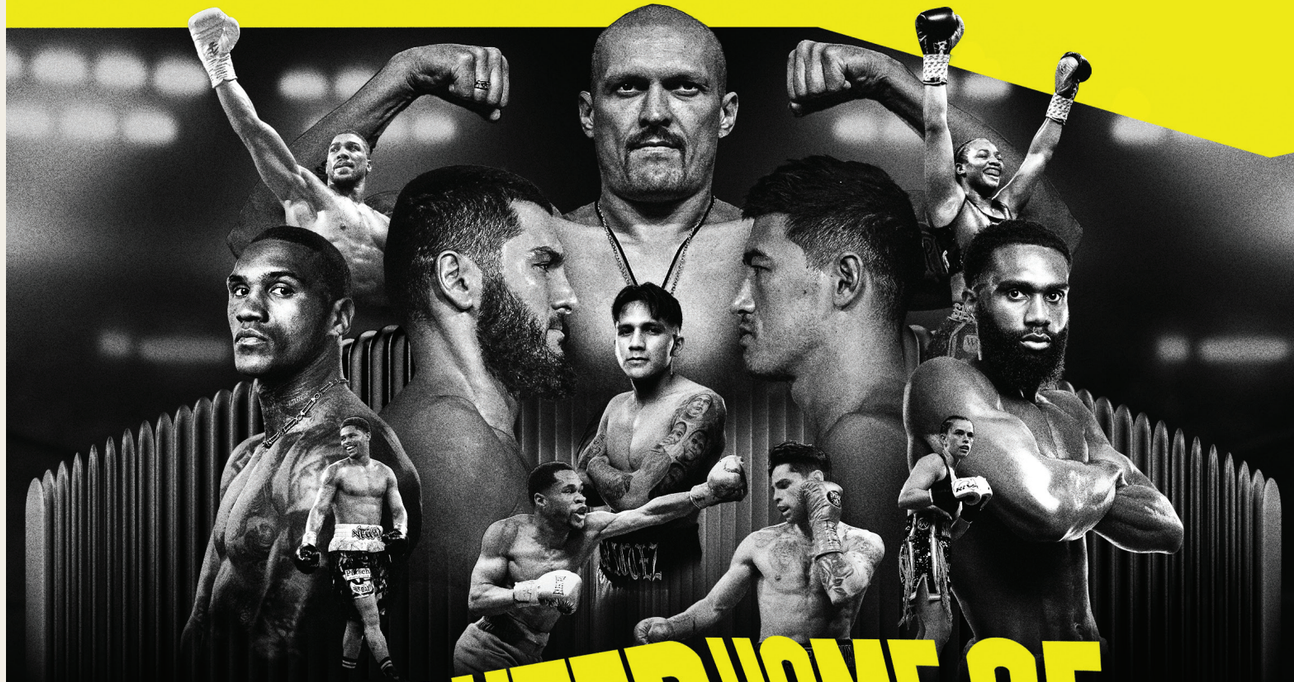

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analysis to help me understand the sport better and learn the fundamentals. I found myself being more and more interested in the sport and watching more cards than I had before. Many of the videos and fights I watched included Crawford, who was even then considered a pound-for-pound fighter with a skill level unmatched in the sport.

Over the next couple of years, I became a bigger fan, bought more pay-per-views and went to some fights, the first one being Pacquaio vs. Yordenis Ugas in Las Vegas. I continued to learn more about the fundamentals of the sport so I can better understand what I'm watching.

I'd say my fandom became even bigger once I booked my trip to Las Vegas and bought a ticket to the Spence-Crawford fight. Watching this incredible performance live was one of the most memorable sports-related moments of my life.

Many fans cite Crawford's victory over Errol Spence Jr. as their favorite moment in Bud's career.

Over the next few years, I proceeded to become a huge boxing fan who watched every single card that I could, both mainstream and small/local. I also saw several more fights in Vegas, including Tank Davis vs. Frank Martin and Naoya Inoue-Ramon Cardenas.

A year ago, I also started going to a boxing gym a few times a week, and it has helped me become an even better fan of the sport as well as one that understands all the small intricacies during any fight. I don't fight but do high-intensity interval boxing exercises, bag work as well as some light sparring. It has been incredibly beneficial for me, and I can't really go more than a few days without going to that gym to let loose and relieve some stress.

I know this is a long story, but the crux of it is that I highly doubt I would be watching every fight that I could without watching all of those Crawford fights on YouTube and seeing him put forward a masterful performance that night in Vegas. He turned me into a huge boxing fan and it led to my involvement in boxing workouts, which has subsequently helped keep me active and healthy.

My superfight prediction is that Crawford will win the fight in a unanimous decision, winning seven rounds and scoring one knockdown, something that has never occurred in Canelo's career.

Petar Guetzov

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RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

AN EXTRA-SPECIAL SPECIAL

Welcome to our latest special issue! In The Ring's 103-year history, it is quite possibly the publication's grandest effort in previewing an anticipated superfight.

I might be wrong about that. I might not be wrong. Let's just say this is the most comprehensive big-bout preview issue in recent memory.

Starting with a cover creation by legendary photographer David LaChapelle, we went all-out for this expanded August edition – dedicating 128 pages to the Canelo Alvarez-Terence Crawford showdown on September 13.

OK, slight exaggeration there. We have around 20 ad pages – shoutout to our sponsors – but it's not an overstatement to say that more than 100 pages of the magazine you hold in your hands expertly examines the matchup and significance of the highest-profile super middleweight championship in the history of the division.

In 45 years of reading The Ring, I can't recall an entire issue devoted to one fight. Even the biggest boxing event of the previous era – the long-awaited Floyd Mayweather Jr.-Manny Pacquiao showdown – received only a portion of the May 2015 issue that previewed the so-called "Fight of the 21st Century."

Six features (totalling 32 of the issue's 98 pages) were dedicated to Mayweather-Pacquiao. In the 10 years since that mega-event, several other anticipated big fights were featured on the covers of our print editions – Canelo vs. Gennadiy Golovkin I (November 2017), Canelo vs. Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. (July 2017), Jorge Linares vs. Vasiliy Lomachenko (June 2018), Canelo vs. Golovkin 2 (October 2018), Errol Spence Jr. vs. Mikey Garcia (April 2019), Canelo vs. Daniel Jacobs (June 2019), Andy Ruiz vs. Anthony Joshua 2 (January 2020) and Spence vs. Crawford (July 2023) – but none of those compelling matchups commanded the entirety of those issues.

Canelo-Crawford – which will be broadcast live on Netflix, available to the streaming platform's worldwide audience of 300 million households – is an extra-special event that deserves an extra-special issue.

It was an arduous task putting this massive issue together in time to go on sale weeks before Canelo and Crawford put their legacies on the line at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas. However, it was also a gratifying and nostalgic endeavor.

I love special issues, collector's editions, programs, previews – whatever you want to call them. It was always a thrill to see an upcoming big fight on the cover of The Ring back in the 1980s.

The newspaper business was still strong in that decade and many of the dailies covered boxing, especially during the buildup to major championship bouts. However, newspaper sportswriters only reported on so much – generally just the news of the day, what was said at press conferences, media events, etc. Sometimes enterprising boxing columnists like Michael Katz spent time in one or both fighters' camps and would bring back notes on their teams, training and sparring, which I greatly appreciated and hungrily consumed.

#MayPac was huge, but it didn't take over the May 2015 issue.

But I always wanted more. I wanted in-depth interviews with the fighters. I wanted articles providing insight into the minds and spirits of the fighters. I wanted history. I wanted analysis. I wanted expert opinions. I was only going to get that in the pages of quality boxing magazines, and The Bible of Boxing was the ultimate authority.

The first big-fight preview issue of The Ring that I can remember (and the second boxing magazine I ever purchased) was the July 1980 edition that looked forward to the Sugar Ray Leonard-Roberto Duran showdown. The "Special Leonard-Duran Program Section" of that issue spanned 20 pages consisting of large, black-and-white action photos, biographical capsules, notes on the fighters' records and common opponents, a tale of the tape and scorecard, as well as predictions from boxing pundits and personalities.

Two fight-related features – a "Pictorial Portfolio" of great welterweight fights of the past and an extensive listing of EVERY 147-pound world title bout from 1892 to 1980 – were included in the program section. Both gave me perspective that the newspaper reports lacked on the magnitude and significance of the latest welterweight championship. These articles also began building the foundation to my understanding and appreciation of boxing history.

This was the first time I read about legendary former champions such as Mickey Walker, Henry Armstrong and Emile Griffith, as well as classic welterweight battles like Jimmy McLarnin-Barney Ross and Sugar Ray Robinson-Kid Gavilan.

It's my hope that the historical articles in this issue – on Mexico's grand legacy, legendary weight-climbers who dared to be great and the origin of the 168-pound division, to name a few – give you proper perspective on Canelo-Crawford and what the fighters are attempting to achieve with a victory on September 13.

Just reading the biographical capsules of Leonard and Duran and seeing their records listed back in 1980 gave me a better understanding of the elite-level fight that would take place on June 20.

The thought of Leonard losing was inconceivable to my 10-year-old brain, but the information The Ring provided was enough to inform me that Duran was going to push my hero a hell of a lot harder than Dave "Boy" Green did. Learning about Duran's lightweight reign of terror and looking at his 71-1 (55 KOs) record made me nervous.

I'm not sure how much I would have understood at the time, but it would have been fascinating to read an article that examined the style matchup of "The Brawl in Montreal."

I believe we provide that analytical breakdown for Canelo-Crawford with the two BATTLE PLAN features in this issue.

I should have known there was a clear path to victory for Duran, and after reading about the strengths and weaknesses of both Alvarez and Crawford – straight from the brilliant boxing minds of trainers Rudy Hernandez and Stephen "Breadman" Edwards – you'll understand that there isn't a clear favorite in this super middleweight matchup.

The Leonard-Duran special included welterweight championship history.

And if you're understandably cynical about two multimillionaire veterans near the end of Hall-of-Fame careers giving their all on fight night, reading the exclusive Q&A interviews with both fighters in this issue might put some of that skepticism to rest.

Crawford isn't the media-friendliest fighter, but managing editor Tom Gray got the sometimes-surly Nebraskan to expound on his motivation to challenge Alvarez.

Canelo also opened up during his interview with esteemed Spanish-language broadcaster and columnist Ernesto Amador, who goes back nearly 20 years with his record-breaking countryman. Alvarez is respectful of Crawford's skill and talent but critical of the American's resume (in comparison to his) while confident in his own abilities and unparralleled experience.

Crawford has the same confidence and even more of a chip on his shoulder going into the biggest fight of his 17-year pro career. You'll understand why after you read THE REDEEMER, penned by Nebraska college football star Vershan Jackson, who has known Crawford since his fellow Omaha native's early days in the gym.

We're pleased to introduce Jackson and Amador to the readers of The Ring and we're proud to welcome back many regular contributors – including Hall of Famer Wallace Matthews and award-winning author Don Stradley – whose writing talents, insight and reporting made this 128-page periodical as entertaining as it is informative.

The best thing I can say about this special issue is that if you're not already excited about Canelo-Crawford, you will be after reading it. RING

THE BIRTH OF CANELO

TODAY WE KNOW HIM BY A SINGLE NAME,
BUT SAUL ALVAREZ BECAME THE FACE OF BOXING
THROUGH YEARS OF STUDYING HIS CRAFT,
HONING HIS SKILLS AND CHALLENGING HIMSELF

By Doug Fischer

Before the word "Canelo" was a global brand attached to the face of North American boxing, it was just the fighting moniker of a teenage prospect from Mexico.

"Saul Alvarez" is what he was called here in the U.S. if you go back more than 15 years. His nickname, "Canelo" (Spanish for cinnamon), was only heard during his ring introductions and in the chants from the small cheering sections inside the casino ballrooms where his first two fights on American soil took place back in 2008.

No fanfare accompanied those bouts. And even when the U.S. boxing media began to take notice a few years later, the jury was out on how good the freckle-faced ginger really was.

I was one of those skeptics. However, even during the early years of Alvarez's rise, the personable young man from Guadalajara grew on me. It wouldn't take long for him to impress me – and the rest of the world – as a fighter and a competitor.

Let's take a stroll down memory lane (and through my old reporter's notebooks), back to the MaxBoxing.com days (when I was more of a beat writer than an editor) and my early years with The Ring.

First reference, first impression

I heard the name "Saul" for the first time in November 2003. It was after a press conference at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles, the site of one of Golden Boy Promotions' first shows. The card was co-headlined by two rugged Guadalajara veterans – Oscar Larios and Javier Jauregui – trained and managed by the Reynosos: Chepo and Eddy ("Edison" back then). The father-and-son team were fielding questions from a small group of mostly Latino sportswriters, including Ramiro Gonzalez, the boxing scribe for La Opinión (the largest Spanish-language newspaper on the West Coast at the time).

Gonzalez asked Chepo about "Saul," which instantly put a big smile on the old trainer's face. He spoke enthusiastically in Spanish to Gonzalez, who later filled me in about the prepubescent amateur – youngest of seven boxing brothers – who was tough enough to serve as a sparring partner for Larios, the reigning WBC 122-pound titleholder.

Fast-forward almost five years to October 2008. Gonzalez, who had become Golden Boy's PR director, told me that Alvarez was set to make his U.S. debut on a GBP card at the Morongo Casino in Cabazon, California. "You want to be there," he said. "Saul is going to be the next Chavez."

I rolled my eyes at what seemed like typical publicist bullshit, but the backstory of a rare Mexican redhead turning pro at 15, fighting on free TV (Televisa) and quickly becoming one of the most popular fighters in his boxing-rich country piqued my interest.

However, I wasn't curious enough to brave Southern California traffic on a Friday night. Don't judge me; Cabazon is 100 miles east of my hometown of Inglewood. It was easier to watch Alvarez on free Spanish-language TV – TeleFutura's

Illustration by Smithe

"Solo Boxeo" series, which featured two of my favorite boxing commentators, Ricardo Celis and Bernardo Osuna. (No, I don't speak Spanish, but I always enjoyed their call on fights. Is that weird?)

I expected a competitive bout because I was familiar with Alvarez's opponent, Larry Mosley Jr., a highly touted amateur who never panned out as a pro.

At 28, Mosley was considered a failed prospect despite carrying a respectable 15-2-2 (6 KOs) record into the Alvarez bout. Ten years earlier, he had been the No. 1-rated amateur welterweight in the U.S. Top Rank signed him in 2000 but released him by the end of 2005. That was the last year Mosley won a fight, and he was coming off a TKO loss four months prior to facing Alvarez, so most dismissed him as cannon fodder.

I didn't. I witnessed the talented Watts native befuddle world-class pros at the L.A. Boxing Club when he was a teenager. Mosley could box his ass off when motivated (which was seldom).

I viewed him as a potential banana peel with his quick hands and slick style and figured the Reynosos might've failed to do their homework. Or maybe they had, and they truly believed in their teen sensation.

Canelo's stretch of homecoming fights in 2009 included a first-round stoppage of Carlos Herrera.

Alvarez, who was announced as 18 years old (minimum age for pros in California) but was really 17, was presented as "Saul Alvarez" on the Solo Boxeo graphics. "Canelo" was only seen on the waistband of his brown trunks and emblazoned on a welcome banner held by an enthusiastic group in red T-shirts.

He made those vociferous fans happy, winning a brisk but uneventful 10-round decision by scores of 99-91, 97-93 and 96-94 (which I agreed with), improving his record to 22-0-1 (15 KOs). I was underwhelmed by both fighters and thought they gave each other too much respect.

The first half of the bout was a contest of jabs, but it was Mosley inching forward. Alvarez didn't land his jab with authority or sit down on any follow-up punches until the second half of the fight, and while he hit Mosley a lot harder than the American hit him, he inexplicably retreated to the ropes for portions of the late rounds.

I was glad I stayed home.

I admit I was a bit spoiled when it came to Mexican up-and-comers. I witnessed the rise of Marco Antonio Barrera and the Marquez brothers, Juan Manuel and Rafael, at Forum Boxing shows in Inglewood as a ticket-buying fan during the early-to-mid '90s and from press row as a newbie member of the boxing media later in the decade. That trio was touted as Mexico's boxing future and they looked the part.

Alvarez looked "exotic" outside of the ring but not very special inside it.

He didn't have the volume-punching, pressure-fighting attack of young Barrera or the surgical technique of featherweight Juan Manuel or the explosive power Rafael wielded on his way up the bantamweight ladder.

What was Alvarez's style? I wasn't sure on first viewing. It looked like he was trying to emulate Mosley's sneaky jab and upper-body movement during their early rounds. I thought he lacked the confidence to really go after Mosley later in the bout. Maybe Alvarez was overthinking his approach. Maybe I was overthinking and needed to see more of him.

First interview, first live fight

Alvarez fought seven times in 2009, all in Mexico, all at the welterweight limit, collecting minor belts along the way. His HBO debut came in his second bout of 2010, the first bout of his I covered live.

Alvarez, now 19, faced Jose Miguel Cotto in the co-feature to the Floyd Mayweather Jr.-Shane Mosley HBO PPV main event on May 1 at MGM Grand in Las Vegas. The 10-round bout would serve as Alvarez's audition for future appearances on the subscription cable network.

I met and interviewed Alvarez for the first time at a media workout in Los Angeles two weeks prior to the bout.

Two things I immediately recall is that Alvarez sparred for the media, which was an old-school Mexican tradition, and he clearly understood my questions but still used Gonzalez to translate his answers to English.

He was polite and humble but also confident, not just in his ability but in his vision for his future. Alvarez and Golden Boy, who he had recently signed with, were aiming for a world title shot at welterweight or junior middleweight by early 2011.

I didn't give much thought to those plans, because it just seemed like wishful thinking. I wanted insight on his fighting style, so I asked him about his boxing heroes and was pleasantly surprised when he answered "Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard." MY boxing heroes! I know it's not a big deal to idolize those two legends, but 99.9999% of the time, young Mexican fighters answer "Julio Cesar Chavez" to that question.

I told Alvarez that I expected more from him during the Mosley bout. He wasn't offended or defensive (another pleasant surprise). He nodded and then matter-of-factly explained that he sets out to "work on different things" during every fight.

"All [Mosley] had was his jab and right hand," Alvarez said. "He didn't punch hard, so I practiced blocking and countering right hands off the ropes."

He said he only had around 40 amateur bouts and needed to continue his education with his first 20-25 pro fights. "I was still a boy when I turned pro," Alvarez said. It made sense. He added that 13 bouts from early in his pro career were not included on his official ledger, which stood at 31-0-1 (23 KOs) at the time.

Aside from having one loss, Cotto's record was identical to Alvarez's, but the 32-year-old veteran's resume was backed by extensive amateur experience. The older brother of future Hall of Famer Miguel Cotto represented Puerto Rico at the 1996 Olympics.

Just before the start of the press conference for the Mayweather-Mosley undercard, Alvarez told me that he would be "too strong" for Jose Cotto and that he was ready to take on Miguel at 147 or 154.

During that presser, Cotto's emotional young trainer, Joe Santiago, confidently declared that Golden Boy matchmaker Eric Gomez would be fired after his fighter brutally knocked Alvarez out.

Gomez laughed at the presser, but he wasn't laughing midway through the opening round when Alvarez missed with a right cross and got clipped by a sweeping left hook.

Alvarez's body went limp, but he managed to stay on his feet even as he teetered into the ropes.

"Welcome, kid, to the big time," Larry Merchant said during the HBO PPV broadcast.

ALVAREZ UNDERSTOOD THAT YOU MIGHT NOT ALWAYS WIN WHEN YOU TARGET THE TOP DOGS.

Cotto did his best to fulfill his trainer's prophecy, landing four crunching right hands to the jaw as the dazed Alvarez reeled along the ropes. Who knows? Maybe the practice he got in with Mosley helped him survive Cotto's swarming attack. Alvarez got through the near-disastrous first round and seemed recovered at the start of the second. He scored a technical knockdown 10 seconds before the bell when a counter right uppercut caused Cotto to spin off-balance and touch his gloves to the canvas.

Alvarez took control in the third round, staying light on his feet, controlling distance and landing power punches off his jab like his boxing idols. "Too bad he wasn't gifted with their hand speed," I jotted down in my notepad.

Alvarez elected to box off the ropes for most of Round 6, which he did effectively, but doing so allowed Cotto to outwork him. The tactic drew mixed reactions. The crowd was into it. Press row surmised that the kid was gassed. The HBO broadcast booth was split. Harold Lederman said Alvarez was the best at fighting off the ropes since Roy Jones Jr. Merchant replied, "I'm not sure it's the best place for him to be."

Alvarez sporadically stepped on the gas until a series of heavy combinations prompted the referee to save Cotto in Round 9.

The consensus among press row was that Alvarez showed heart in surviving adversity but he was lucky he was in with Jose Cotto, a 5-foot-5 former lightweight, and not Miguel Cotto.

The audition did not go well. Some thought he was being pushed on the public for the wrong reasons.

"If his hair was black and his skin was brown, would they be making a big deal about him?" questioned MaxBoxing writer Gabriel Montoya.

First L.A. appearance

Golden Boy and the Reynosos kept Alvarez busy. Two months after Cotto, he knocked out Luciano Cuello in Guadalajara to set up his second HBO PPV showcase, the co-featured bout to Shane Mosley vs. Sergio Mora at Staples Center in Los Angeles on September 18.

His opponent was another plodding veteran, but this one was a former welterweight champ who had recently taken Vernon Forrest the distance at junior middleweight: Carlos Baldomir.

Golden Boy held a public workout at the historic Olvera Street (a popular Mexican marketplace) in downtown L.A. This was my first time seeing Alvarez outside of a gym or arena, and I noted the large number of female fans that came to see him.

Some of these women, all of whom I presumed were of Mexican descent, were boxing fans, but most had learned about Alvarez from personality pieces they watched or read in Spanish-language media. They practically swooned at the sight of him.

I honestly had no idea women found him attractive. A young PR lady who worked for Golden Boy confirmed his

Jam Media

Alvarez survived a shaky first round against Jose Miguel Cotto (above) and rebounded to win by ninth-round TKO. Carlos Baldomir (below) was an easy target for Canelo, who dropped the Argentine veteran for the count in Round 6.

Nick Potts - PA Images

sex appeal.

"He raises and rides horses in Guadalajara," she gushed.

"That makes him attractive?" I asked.

"Yes! He's a good dancer, too," she replied. "He can salsa, cumbia, merengue and rumba. And he's a gentleman!"

"Gotcha," I shrugged. "If these female admirers show up to Staples Center, Golden Boy might actually have the crossover attraction they've been hyping."

Of course, for that to happen, Alvarez, who was now 20, would not only have to keep winning, he'd have to make statements in the ring. If he couldn't "show out" against a 39-year-old Baldomir, he really was a hype job.

Alvarez delivered, and he did it the best way a young fighter touted as "the future" could – via cold knockout. However, though he was the crowd favorite that night, the arena was quiet before he lowered the boom against the painfully slow Baldomir, who had rehydrated to 169 pounds.

"I can't say that he's dazzled me," Merchant said at the start of Round 6.

With 10 seconds left in the round, Alvarez dropped Baldomir face down to the canvas off a crisp hook after stunning the veteran with right hands. Baldomir was counted out. The Mexican fans in attendance – which included a fair amount of women – were dazzled.

It was Alvarez's 11th knockout in his last 12 bouts. He was picking up steam.

First world title bout

Alvarez fought one more time in 2010, a 12-round decision over iron-chinned Lovemore Ndou. He weighed in at 149½ for that bout in Veracruz, Mexico, which was televised on Televisa and tape-delay broadcast on HBO in the U.S.

Golden Boy wanted Alvarez to win a world title while he could still make 147, meaning his first bout of 2011, but the top two welterweights – pound-for-pound superstars Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather Jr. – were well out of his league. The second-tier candidates – fighters like Andre Berto, Victor Ortiz, Jan Zaveck and Vyacheslav Senchenko – either already had commitments or were content to protect their belts in their homelands.

It was Pacquiao's 150-pound catchweight victory over Antonio Margarito for the vacant WBC 154-pound title (which, having made history, PacMan promptly vacated) that gave Golden Boy an idea: Why not have Alvarez do the same? He could win the junior middleweight title at a catchweight against a WBC-rated 147-pounder and thus position himself for a second title shot at welterweight.

In stepped Matthew Hatton, the European welterweight champ who was No. 5 in the WBC's 147-pound rankings. The gutsy older brother of Ricky Hatton was willing to travel from Manchester, England, to face Alvarez at the Honda Center in Anaheim, California, on March 5, 2011.

That's the business of boxing, and at a Tuesday media workout the week of the fight, it was clear to me that Alvarez was getting more involved in that side of the sport.

Alvarez and the Reynosos were now promoting the Televisa cards he headlined. He proudly told me that they signed Nobuhiro Ishida, a junior middleweight/middleweight from Osaka, Japan, and were interested in signing other Japanese fighters to bring to Mexico.

That seemed out of left field, but Alvarez explained that Japanese bantamweight Tomoki Kameda, who turned pro in Mexico, fought on two Televisa cards in Guadalajara in 2010 and did strong ratings. He reminded me that the Reynosos were no strangers to the Japanese boxing scene, having traveled there four times with Larios.

Ishida was set to fight one of Alvarez's older brothers, Rigoberto, the following month in Guadalajara. The 6-foot-2 slugger dropped a split decision to Rigo but would go on to blitz James Kirkland in the 2011 Upset of the Year before twice challenging for middleweight world titles vs. Dmitry Pirog and a bulldozer from Kazakhstan that Saul would get to know very well.

When asked about his first title bout, Alvarez said, "I'm not too young for this. I'm going to show America how mature I am."

He pooh-poohed anyone who pooh-poohed Hatton as his opponent.

"Hatton is a warrior," Alvarez said. "All fighters are dangerous once you step into the ring. 'Easy' guys can quickly become difficult if you underestimate them."

Wanting extra motivation for this pivotal bout, he told me he had been watching key fights from the careers of Ali, Chavez and Oscar De La Hoya.

Alvarez wasn't just observing their styles. He was watching how they carried themselves on the nights they faced their most formidable rivals. Ali vs. Liston, Frazier and Foreman. Chavez vs. Mayweather, Taylor and Whitaker. De La Hoya vs. Whitaker, Trinidad and Hopkins. Alvarez understood that you might not always win when you target the top dogs.

"I've learned from them," he said. "They all have styles worth emulating. They all accomplished so much. That inspires me. I want to surpass what they did."

Eric Gomez told me the plan was four fights in 2011. He brought up the mediocre welterweight beltholders, Zaveck and Senchenko, but he also mentioned newly minted WBA 154-pound titleholder Austin Trout.

"He's interested in fighting Trout, who just beat [Rigoberto Alvarez] for a title in Mexico. That's a tough fight," said Gomez, who added that was the type of matchup that would get Alvarez on HBO's primetime flagship series, *Championship Boxing*.

"We'll see how he does on Saturday and see if HBO likes him."

The HBO brass didn't like it when Alvarez missed the contracted 150-pound catchweight by a pound and a half, which reportedly cost him 30% of his purse. Alvarez seemed genuinely embarrassed and disappointed with himself at the weigh-in.

I was disappointed with the result of the fight even though it was a near-

shutout decision over the game and pesky Hatton. I expected Alvarez to stop the undersized Mancunian.

The 11,000 fans in attendance, however, were elated.

In my RingTV.com fight report, I said "the most special thing about Alvarez is his ability to put butts in the seats."

The Ring, which featured Alvarez on the cover for the first time shortly after the Hatton fight, was more positive in its spin, declaring him "boxing's new pied piper" with the coverline to the June 2011 issue.

I also noted that the Hatton bout was on the after-hours *Boxing After Dark* series reserved for up-and-comers and the lighter weight classes. When would he be ready for *Championship Boxing*?

Two months later, at a private gym in Big Bear Lake, California, I got a strong indication of Alvarez's future.

First Golovkin experience

I met Abel Sanchez in the summer of 1999. He had already coached several fighters to world titles – including Terry Norris, my favorite boxer of the early '90s – and was now training Frans Botha at a public gym in Big Bear for a showdown with fellow heavyweight fringe contender Shannon Briggs.

I gave Sanchez a call after hearing numerous rumors about one of his fighters humbling one tough hombre after another at his gym and boxing clubs around Los Angeles. He told me about Gennadiy Golovkin and boldly declared that the middleweight could be better than Norris. I told him to let me know the next time Golovkin was in camp and I'd visit for a RingTV article. Sanchez called me in late May 2011. "Gennadiy's been here a couple weeks and he's ready to begin sparring."

"Awesome. Who's he sparring?"

"You're gonna love this," Sanchez said. "He's sparring the redhead from Mexico."

Golovkin, the secondary WBA beltholder, was preparing for a June 17 defense against Kassim Ouma in Panama. Alvarez needed to get out of Guadalajara to focus on his first title defense against Ryan Rhodes on June 18 in his hometown.

Alvarez believed that training in Guadalajara – with all the drama and distractions that come with being the region's best-known fighter – led to a poor camp and his missing weight for Hatton. He knew he had to be at his best for Rhodes, The Ring's No. 4-rated junior middleweight at the time. Despite holding the WBC trinket, Alvarez only climbed from No. 10 to No. 9 in the rankings following the Hatton bout.

"I know I'm at a new level now," Alvarez told me about his choice to train at The Summit. "My opponents will be stronger so I wanted to come here to concentrate, to get into the best shape and see new tactics, new training methods. I want to know how others train."

Alvarez and the Reynosos had been there since May 5. Sanchez liked the trio and described Alvarez as a "hard worker."

Sanchez wanted to instill a Mexican style of fighting on Golovkin, and part of that indoctrination was sparring with Mexicans. Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. and Alfredo Angulo couldn't hang with the unknown middleweight from Kazakhstan, but Alvarez was different.

"He's got the skills," Sanchez said of Alvarez. "All he needs is the physical strength to go with it. He and his team are learning from my conditioning system. This is like a school; it's not a public gym with egos on the line.

"This has been good for him. At home, Saul is the big dog. He was taking it easy on his sparring partners, probably letting them hit him. There was nowhere to go up [from] there. Here, he's gotta be on his Ps and Qs, because there's a bigger dog in this gym."

Eric Gomez and fellow matchmaker Robert Diaz visited a few days before I did. Sanchez said they were "very happy" with what they witnessed. Now it was my turn.

No one who watched them spar in 2011 could have imagined the scale of the Canelo-Golovkin trilogy.

Erik W. Rasco

From my notebook (yes, I've still got it. I should note, however, that I've fixed my shorthand for readability. It was a six-round sparring session with four-minute rounds, which is insane given the 6,700-foot elevation. I was still calling him "Alvarez" in my notes, not "Canelo." Gennadiy is just "Golovkin," not "GGG.")

Round 1 – Alvarez is on his toes when he jabs and moves, conceding Golovkin's size. Golovkin, who occasionally switches stances as he advances, slips a beautifully timed left uppercut between Alvarez's jabs. Alvarez loads up with a hook that misses and causes him to spin halfway around. Golovkin doesn't work his jab as much as Alvarez, but it's harder and more accurate.

Alvarez lands a counter right, followed by a hook that connects and shakes Golovkin to his shoes.

Alvarez stands his ground with a minute to go. Golovkin presses Alvarez back, targeting his body for the final 20 seconds.

Round 2 – Golovkin stalks Alvarez behind a stiff jab and a little bit of head movement. He's trying to cut the ring off on Alvarez, who isn't trying to avoid confrontation, even when his back is near the ropes. Alvarez uses upper-body movement to evade Golovkin's heavier shots.

"Bien! Bien! Bien!" Chepo Reynoso yells out every time Alvarez moves his head.

Alvarez lands a body-head hook combination mid-round. Golovkin fires back, but the kid leans away and attempts to counterpunch. Golovkin blocks the counter and backs away. Alvarez follows.

A hard left hook 10 seconds before the bell appears to rock Alvarez. His right leg stiffens. He doesn't immediately return to his corner at the bell. He walks it off and tries to stretch the right leg on the top rope.

Round 3 – Golovkin presses Alvarez, who recognizes the difference in strength and power but seems more dialed in. He abandons his head movement and fires back with both hands.

I'm learning more about Alvarez's temperament. If he gets hurt or starts feeling overwhelmed in a fight, he may go for broke.

Golovkin blocks much of Alvarez's fire and stays on top of him. Alvarez keeps his gloves up, but the placement allows for a sharpshooter to pierce the center, which Golovkin does.

Alvarez sucks it up as he walks forward, blocking as much as he can. He gets his shots in when he lets his hands go, including a hook-cross combination.

"YOU'RE GONNA LOVE THIS," SANCHEZ SAID. "HE'S SPARRING THE REDHEAD FROM MEXICO."

Alvarez fights in spots. He can be outworked, especially with a busy jab. He's got a good chin, but it's not indestructible.

Round 4 – Golovkin's hook is not as fluid as Alvarez's, but the technique is tighter. There's no "Bien" from Alvarez's corner until two and a half minutes into the round when Saul lets his hands go in combination. Golovkin moves his head well, blocking expertly.

Round 5 – Both jab and block at the same time. Golovkin continues to walk down a tired-looking Alvarez. Alvarez shotguns his jab effectively, keeping Golovkin from smothering him. However, Golovkin is able to land single lead power shots, particularly his left.

Alvarez moves around the ring, his back occasionally grazing the ropes, but he lets his hands go in quick spurts.

Round 6 – Alvarez catches a second wind as some bounce returns to his legs. He's sticking and moving more effectively now.

"Muy bien!" Chepo yells when Alvarez lands a right uppercut-right cross combination off the ropes.

The kid is very relaxed in the ring, even when under tremendous pressure.

They load up with their best power shots to close out the round and the sparring session.

"Six rounds, 24 minutes, at altitude!" exclaims Abel.

"That was great," said lightweight contender Urbano Antillon, who was training with Sanchez at the time. "Two undefeated champions going at it. You don't see this often."

We would see it in the ring two years later when Alvarez took on Trout in front of 40,000 fans at the Alamodome in San Antonio. That's when Canelo was born, in my opinion. That's when the hype and popularity finally equaled the challenge.

That fight would lead directly to Mayweather, which would remove the training wheels from his career development. Risky matchups and significant bouts followed: Erislandy Lara, Miguel Cotto, two epic clashes with Golovkin (the rematch earning 2018 Fight of the Year honors from The Ring), Daniel Jacobs, Sergey Kovalev, and his historic super middleweight championship reign, which continues today.

Regardless of what happens on September 13, Alvarez has already forged a hall-of-fame legacy.

Looking at the Canelo of today – the brawny, bearded and tattooed superstar who boldly speaks F-bomb-laden English – I'm reminded of how shy and young he was when I first met him.

I'm also reminded of how confident and ambitious Alvarez was, and of his dedication to his dream regardless of his shortcomings. He was a student of boxing who gradually acquired the skills, experience and power to overcome a lack of elite-level speed and athleticism.

A near 20-year pro career that spans several eras – cable, streaming, Mayweather, Pacquiao … Canelo – began with a kid named Saul.

THE LEGACY OF AZTEC BOXING

A LEGION OF GREATS WROTE THE STORY OF MEXICAN BOXING WITH THEIR HEARTS AND FISTS – NOW IT'S **CANELO'S** TURN

By Ernesto Amador

Mexico is synonymous with boxing prestige. For Mexican fans, boxing isn't just a sport. It's a religion.

If this entire magazine were devoted to Mexico's boxing history, there wouldn't be enough pages to mention every iconic figure who is part of the legacy. Focusing on only the most representative names of the modern era – beginning in the 1950s – is the best way to put the story of Canelo Alvarez in perspective.

THE LEGENDS THAT PAVED THE WAY

Raúl "Ratón" Macías

From Tepito to the world, Macías was one of the first idols of Mexican boxing. Celebrated for his charisma and elegance, Macías represented Mexico in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics and compiled a 41-2 (25 KOs) record during a 10-year pro career, winning the bantamweight title and the hearts of Mexican fans in the process.

In 1959, "El Ratón" fought in front of 17,000 people at Arena México, then announced his retirement at just 24 years old. He appeared in the ring once more for a charity event three years later.

Rubén Olivares

This native of Iguala, Guerrero, is one of the greatest bantamweights in history. Nicknamed "Púas" ("Spikes") because of his hair, he thrilled Mexicans with his boxing brilliance and his wild, unfiltered way of living. Discipline was not his strong suit, but his talent inside the ring was undeniable.

Olivares was unbeaten in his first 62 pro bouts (61-0-1, 57 KOs), from 1965 to late 1970. In 1969, he beat Lionel Rose for the bantamweight championship at The Forum in Inglewood, which was like his second home. Whenever and wherever

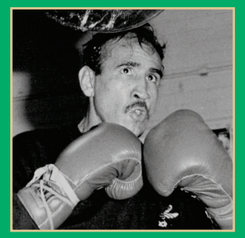
Olivares fought, it was a national celebration. He held world titles at both 118 and 126 pounds and retired with an 89-13-3 (79 KOs) record.

Salvador Sánchez

At 23 years old, on August 12, 1982, Sánchez died in a car crash. Many believed he would become the greatest Mexican fighter of all time. Some still rank Sal above Julio César Chávez.

We'll never know how far he could have gone, but what's certain is that he made Mexican fans proud when he defeated Danny "Little Red" López to become Mexico's latest featherweight champion in 1980. Eighteen months later, he brought immense joy to the nation when he delivered a decisive knockout (TKO 8) over unbeaten (32-0-1, 32 KOs) Puerto Rican idol Wilfredo Gómez.

His last fight came on July 21, 1982, when he stopped Ghana's future legend Azumah Nelson in the 15th round at Madison Square Garden.



Carlos Zárate

Nicknamed "El Cañas" from a young age due to his skinny legs, Zárate was a man with devastating punching power.

He emerged from the legendary cradle of Mexican fighters known as Tepito – "el barrio bravo" – one of the toughest neighborhoods in Mexico City, and boxed professionally from 1970 to 1988, establishing himself as one of the greatest bantamweights in history. His style was brilliant – marked by exceptional head and waist movement and brutally accurate punching prowess.

Zarate retired from boxing with 66 victories, an astonishing 63 of them by knockout, and only four losses.

Daniel Zaragoza

No boxing movie can outdo the bloody, real-life wars "The Bulldog of Tacubaya" took part in. With total commitment, a massive heart, great skill and impeccable character, this crafty and unorthodox southpaw conquered both the bantamweight and junior featherweight divisions during a 17-year career. Zaragoza defeated the best of his era: Zárate, Valerio Nati, Paul Banke (twice), Chan-Yong Park, Kiyoshi Hatanaka, José Sanabria, Héctor Acero Sánchez, Joichiro Tatsuyoshi (twice) and Wayne McCullough.

Zaragoza retired at 39 with an impressive 55-8-3 (28 KOs) record. His final performance passed the torch to a future legend, 21-year-old Erik Morales.

Julio César Chávez

In Mexico, Chávez's fights were national holidays. The entire country came to a halt when he entered the ring.

Chávez fought 115 professional bouts and was unbeaten for an astounding 90-bout (89-0-1) streak. He took part in 37 world title fights and made 27 title defenses. These numbers make Chávez not only the greatest Mexican fighter, but one of the greatest in history worldwide.

He also holds a record that seems impossible to beat – 132,274 people paid to attend his 140-pound title defense against Greg Haugen at Estadio Azteca (some sources say 136,000) on February 20, 1993.

Chávez won world titles in three divisions and fought the best of his era, including Rocky Lockridge, Héctor "Macho" Camacho, Meldrick Taylor (twice), Oscar De La Hoya (twice), Frankie Randall (three times), Pernell Whitaker, Edwin "Chapo" Rosario, and Roger "Black Mamba" Mayweather (twice).

In his prime, Chávez carried Mexican boxing on his back. He remains its greatest idol.

Humberto González

"La Chiquita" ("The Little One") embodies the classic Mexican fighter: a family man, a hard worker and a man of unwavering faith. A devoted follower of the Virgin of Guadalupe, González went from working in a butcher shop to becoming one of the legends of the lighter weight divisions and one of the first to break the million-dollar earnings mark for a single fight.

Unlike many others, González never turned his back on his roots or his hometown of Nezahualcóyotl, where he still lives. He wisely diversified his income into several ventures, including butcher shops, banquet halls, casinos and restaurants. His rivalry with Michael "Little Hands of Stone" Carbajal was epic. González suffered a terrifying knockout to Carbajal in the 1993 Fight of the Year, then won the second and third bouts of their legendary trilogy. He retired in 1995 with a 43-3 (30 KOs) record.

Juan Manuel Márquez

December 8, 2012, is a date forever etched in the hearts of Mexican fans. At 2:59 of Round 6 of the fourth bout between Márquez and Manny Pacquiao, a thunderous right hand shocked fans at the MGM Grand and stunned millions watching around the world. Márquez, known as "Dinamita," ended one of boxing's greatest rivalries with the Knockout of the Year.

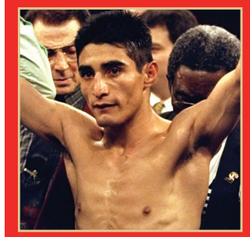
Despite losing his pro debut in 1993, the Mexico City native climbed to world titles in four divisions. His battles against Pacquiao, Marco Antonio Barrera, Juan Díaz, Joel Casamayor, Michael Katsidis, Robbie Peden and Terdsak Jandaeng are unforgettable. He was a master technician, but tenacity was his greatest virtue – it carried him to his place among the all-time greats.

Marco Antonio Barrera

Who could forget Barrera's master class vs. Naseem Hamed? Naz entered their fight with a formidable 35-0 (31 KOs) record, but the Mexican underdog undressed "The Prince" over 12 brilliant rounds.

His 12-round wars with Erik Morales at 122, 126 and 130 pounds comprise one of the greatest trilogies of all time and their bad-blood rivalry was among the fiercest in history.

Barrera only lost to the best: Morales, Pacquiao, Márquez, Junior Jones and Amir Khan. His victories over Morales, Johnny Tapia, Kennedy McKinney, Paulie Ayala, Kevin Kelley and Rocky Juarez elevated him to Mexican idol status.



Érik Morales

Tijuana is boxing – it hosts more fight cards annually than most cities on earth. From there emerged Morales, one of the standard-bearers of Mexican boxing. "El Terrible" was gifted, reckless, fierce and fearless, a quintessential Mexican fighter. He didn't need an impressive physique – when he stepped into the ring, he became a beast, willing to sacrifice everything to make history.

For nearly 20 years, Morales gave fans legendary battles. He knocked out fellow Mexican legend Daniel Zaragoza to win his first world title. He won the epic first bout of his trilogy with Barrera, which produced the 2000 and 2004 Fights of the Year. He was the first Mexican to beat Pacquiao. And he was the first Mexican to win titles in four divisions.

Now that you've been introduced to the modern greats, let's learn what they have to say about what it takes to become a Mexican legend and get their views of Canelo Alvarez's career so far. Is he a member of the pantheon?

RUBÉN OLIVARES, INTERNATIONAL BOXING HALL OF FAME (IBHOF) INDUCTION: 1991

What does it take to become a Mexican boxing legend?

"It's about giving yourself completely. It meant fighting 15 rounds without rest and doing things the right way – with honesty and, as Ultiminio 'Sugar' Ramos used to say, 'with cojones, chico,' giving all the glory to God. But you always have to earn the place that's meant for you and recognize that God is with all of us, all the time. I always knelt before Him, because He's the one who made us, the one who places us where we're meant to be so that we can become who we are."

Is Canelo a legend of Mexican boxing?

"Canelo is a legend. He's a great fighter. He has a great team – people who don't take advantage of him. He has the people he needs. And he's also very smart, because he understands this is a business. It's a great thing that Canelo is doing all this, so fighters can learn to protect themselves, to become their own promoters, their own sponsors – everything. He runs his businesses and takes care of them. He's a great guy. And that's just the truth. Canelo is the current world champion, the promoter, the producer, the director of his events. He does it all. The fighters of my generation weren't able to do that. It's great that Canelo came along to set the example. I don't know why people get mad about Canelo. No, Canelo is number one."

Where does Canelo rank in Mexican boxing history?

"Canelo is already among the greats of Mexican boxing – he's that and more. He's a world champion. He's the face of boxing and generates a lot of money. He's shown the way to both the old school and the new generation."

Anadolu

Has Canelo created his own era?

"Canelo has written his own era, and all he's missing now is one huge fight. I admire Canelo a lot. I care for him. He is the number one and he's been there for a long time."

CARLOS ZÁRATE, IBHOF INDUCTION: 1994

What does it take to become a Mexican boxing legend?

"Above all, you have to win fights, be a complete figure, treat the fans well and, most importantly, prove yourself in the ring.

"I thank God for giving me the gift of becoming a champion, for letting me be part of this sport and, most importantly, for allowing me to succeed and show people that I was born for this. It's something very big, very beautiful, and you can't let it go to your head, because everything depends on the fans. Becoming a complete figure is a gift from God."

Is Canelo a legend of Mexican boxing?

"Well, there's a lot of talk about Canelo because he's the boxer of the moment, but his legitimacy as a champion has been widely debated. There's been a lot of criticism – some say he 'buys' his opponents. Still, he's a world champion, and if that doesn't make him a real champion – even as the number one – then maybe he's the number one in terms of money. And that's OK, because that's what we fight for, and he's done it well.

"But I think in the ring he still needs to prove a little more. Not that he lacks anything – he has a lot – but he's just short of fully achieving that legendary status.

"Honestly, as a fighter, he's shown that he puts it all on the line in the ring. But I think he's more of an idol to women than to men, and this is a toughman's sport."

Where does Canelo rank in Mexican boxing history?

"I think he should retire first. But if Canelo were to retire today, he'd have to be among the greats of Mexican boxing – at least in the top five.

"I would describe Canelo as a surprising, crowd-drawing figure who became a champion and, at the same time, a controversial one. He hasn't quite lived up to what people expected of him, but then again it's not easy to win the recognition of everybody. Still, when you really look at him, he's a good fighter."

DANIEL ZARAGOZA, IBHOF INDUCTION: 2004

What does it take to become a Mexican boxing legend?

"First and foremost, attitude. Then aptitude and an enormous passion for boxing. When I went to the [1980] Olympics, my father, who was also my friend, gave me great advice. He told me: 'When you go out to fight, don't cross yourself or do anything religious, because the whole world will be watching, and many people will be of different religions. So your faith should be in yourself.'"

Is Canelo a legend of Mexican boxing?

"When I came back from Moscow, the legends who came before me were on their way out, and it was my turn to receive the torch of Mexican boxing – something that never ends in our sport. In a way, boxing is like a religion in Mexico. Canelo lacks nothing. His career has been long and successful, and with all that he's accomplished and continues to achieve, he'll always be remembered – for better or worse, no matter what. But without a doubt, he is the most controversial fighter in the history of Mexican boxing."

Where does Canelo rank in Mexican boxing history?

"I've never liked making top 10 or top five all-time lists, because there are so many fighters who deserve to be on those lists. Honestly, top 10 isn't enough for Mexican boxing. Mine would be more like a top 15, because you can't leave many of them out. Still, to answer your question directly, Canelo definitely belongs among the top five in Mexican boxing history. But I can't take out fighters like 'Finito' [Ricardo Lopez], Olivares, Zárate, Sánchez, Barrera or Morales when measuring greatness – and I'm surely forgetting some others as well."

Has Canelo created his own era?

"Definitely, yes. Canelo has written his own era."

HUMBERTO GONZÁLEZ, IBHOF INDUCTION: 2006

What does it take to become a Mexican boxing legend?

"Well, like with everything, you have to keep fighting and winning and winning, because losing doesn't help you. I think it's about winning and about making sure people leave happy wherever you fought. They should come to watch you and enjoy your style.

"Fans always leave the arena feeling excited after a good fight – or sometimes angry, because that's how criticism works. Ultimately, people have to decide whether I'm number one or not.

"When I fought, I always put myself in God's hands. I would say I wanted to win and that just as I climbed into the ring with all my senses intact, I wanted both of us to come out the same way. Boxing is a jealous sport – it's tough. But you have to give it your all and always prepare properly.

"I also used to look up to greats like Carlos Zárate, Olivares and Chávez. They were my role models."

Is Canelo a legend of Mexican boxing?

"I know Canelo well, and yes, he keeps rising. Right now, he keeps taking more and more fights, and that's what you always want as a fighter. And the opponents he's had haven't been easy, either. Even when people call a fighter 'easy,' that so-called easy one can beat you. So, there are no easy opponents. To me, Canelo is an idol."

Where does Canelo rank in Mexican boxing history?

"Canelo is among the best regardless of where you place him. Whether you say he's number one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10 – Canelo is in there. People will keep talking about Canelo because he'll always be part of boxing history. So whatever number you rank him, Canelo will always be there, and we'll always remember him."

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP FIGHT COMPARISON

Before we move on to Canelo, it's important to examine a cold but telling metric of greatness: how many world title fights each legend had and their records in those bouts.

Fighter	Title Fights	Record
Julio César Chávez	37	31-4-2 (21 KOs)
Marco Antonio Barrera	28	23-5 (13 KOs)
Canelo Álvarez	26	23-2-1 (11 KOs)
Érik Morales	23	18-5 (11 KOs)
Juan Manuel Márquez	16	10-5-1 (3 KOs)

Source: BoxRec.com

Is Canelo on the level of Mexico's greatest legends?

In a nation where boxing is part of the cultural DNA, being Mexico's top fighter isn't just a title – it's a historic burden. It means being compared to Chávez, Sánchez, Márquez, Morales and Barrera. It means not just fighting opponents in the ring but also battling the ghosts of boxing legends and striving to stand beside the immortals.

Álvarez has achieved feats few ever imagined: world titles in four divisions – junior middleweight, middleweight, super middleweight and light heavyweight – an incredible accomplishment for Mexican fighters, who have historically dominated the lighter weight classes. Despite his short frame (no taller than 5-foot-8), Canelo has defeated respected champions like Gennadiy Golovkin, Daniel Jacobs, Miguel Cotto, Sergey Kovalev, Caleb Plant and Billy Joe Saunders. His only two losses were to one of the greatest in boxing history, Floyd Mayweather Jr., and the current undisputed light heavyweight champ, Dmitry Bivol.

He evolved from a raw, offense-heavy prospect into a masterful counterpuncher, with elite distance control and ruthless body shots. Canelo has become a highly technical fighter with unmatched discipline, earning admiration from many and resentment from others.

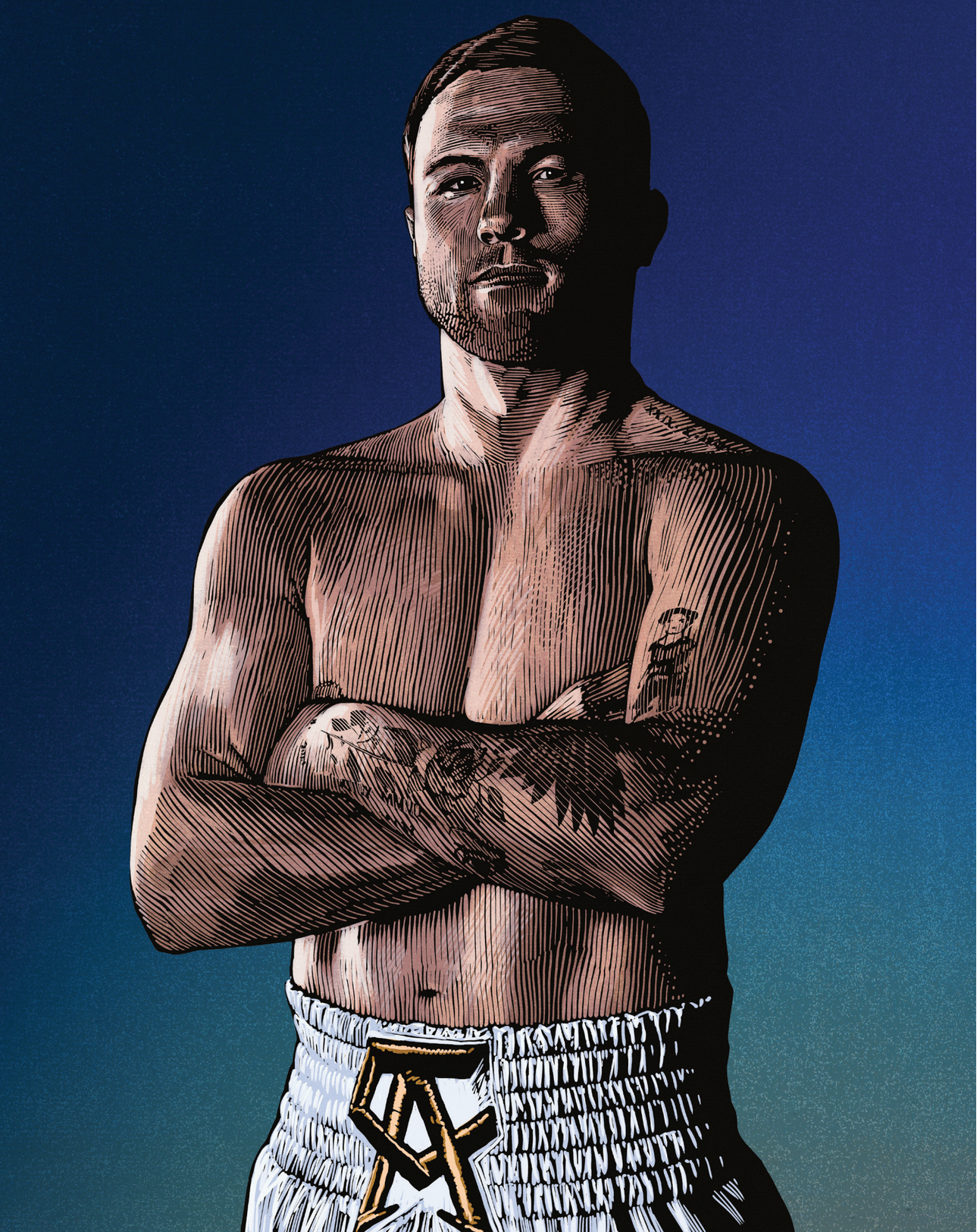
Criticism has followed him – claims of handpicked opponents, controversial decisions and a failed drug test in 2018 have brought out detractors over the years. Yet Canelo never ran or hid from scorn. He kept fighting – and winning.

Is he Julio César Chávez? No. And he's never claimed to be. Canelo has written his own story while honoring those who came before him. And often alone, he's carried the legacy of Mexican boxing on his back. Canelo has crafted his own legacy – and has become the global face of boxing.

Whether history places him above or below Mexico's greatest legends, one thing is clear: Álvarez didn't avoid history. He faced it – punch by punch, challenge by challenge.

On September 13, he'll take on one of the toughest tests of his career. Deep into his professional journey, Canelo will face the undefeated Terence Crawford – an undisputed champion in two weight classes and one of the most skilled fighters of this era. On Mexican Independence weekend, it's Mexico vs. the U.S., a 168-pound showdown with all titles on the line. When it happens, there will be no doubt: We'll be watching the man who is writing the latest chapter of Mexican boxing history. RING

Nick Potts - PA Images



THE STANDARD-BEARER

HE STOPS SHORT OF PLACING HIMSELF AMONG THE ICONS OF MEXICAN BOXING, BUT **CANELO ALVAREZ** FULLY REALIZES THAT HIS LEGACY AND HIS COUNTRY'S HISTORY OF EXCELLENCE ARE INTERTWINED FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE – AND HE TAKES THAT RESPONSIBILITY VERY SERIOUSLY

By Ernesto Amador

I've covered Canelo Alvarez's pro career from its beginning in 2005 and I've known him personally for almost 18 years. I've written more articles on the Mexican sensation than I can remember and have called many of his major fights as a blow-by-blow commentator for Univision, Televisa, Fox Deportes and the Spanish-language international broadcasts for ESPN and Golden Boy Promotions.

He has always been professional and a gentleman, even now that I'm an independent journalist.

Canelo was in good spirits when I interviewed him via Zoom from his home in San Diego during the press tour for the Terence Crawford fight. He understands that he's facing one of the most talented fighters in one of the biggest events of his Hall of Fame career, but he was relaxed and very open when we spoke.

The interview was conducted in Spanish and translated (by me) to English for this article.

Illustration by Chris Wormell

The Ring: Following your decision over William Scull – and I can't recall a performance as disappointing as Scull's – I heard you asked Turki Alalshikh for a smaller ring for your fight against Terence Crawford, and Terence didn't like that.

Canelo Alvarez: Of course. At the end of the day, what we want to offer is a good fight. My job, my responsibility, is to give the fans a good fight, and that can be achieved in a smaller ring. We don't need a big ring.

The Ring: What was your reaction when you heard that Crawford wanted to fight you? We must remember it was Crawford who kept insisting on this fight.

CA: That's right. At first, I didn't pay much attention, because I had other fights lined up. You know me and you know I don't get distracted when I have other commitments coming up. You know that when that happens, I don't pay attention to what's being published or talked about. Honestly, I never thought I'd be involved in this fight, but

here we are. I've been in the same position as him. Crawford is a good fighter, and yes, weight matters, but not as much as people think. At the end of the day, I've almost always been the smaller fighter in this division. I'm always the smaller fighter at super middleweight. So I don't think weight will be a huge factor, but obviously I'm going to take advantage of every advantage I have, and I'll take advantage 100%.

The Ring: What went through your mind when you pointed your finger at Crawford after you pushed him at the New York press conference and you both had to be separated and held back?

CA: You know me well, and you know I don't like these kinds of things at press conferences, but when they provoke me, the switch flips. (laughs) I'm completely sure that Turki Alalshikh told him he had to do something to spice things up. Or who knows? But I'm sure it wasn't Crawford's idea to get in my face the way he did. Because at the first press conference in Riyadh, everything was fine, there was a lot of respect, but New York was different. I'm sure it wasn't Terence Crawford's idea. But personally, I don't take things like this as a joke. I immediately get fired up and take it seriously. So now things are heated.

The Ring: You've moved up in weight divisions, all the way to light heavyweight. Now many say you're fighting a "small man." Is Terence Crawford a small fighter in terms of size?

CA: The press and some people pretend to forget that I've fought bigger guys, but at the end of the day, whatever I do, people will make excuses and come up with reasons to criticize. I'm referring to the people who criticize, because in the end, I have many more people who love me, who support me and who are always with me. Look at the numbers – my career numbers speak for themselves. But some people will always talk. I understand that when a fighter of my level and in my position, with the success I've had and being at the top, there will always be divided opinions – those who criticize and those who support. All of this is part of my career, but at the end of the day, I'm going to fight my fight and give 100% as always, because Crawford is a great fighter, one of the best in recent times, and I'll be ready for the best version of Terence Crawford.

CRAWFORD IS A GOOD FIGHTER, AND YES, WEIGHT MATTERS, BUT NOT AS MUCH AS PEOPLE THINK. AT THE END OF THE DAY, I'VE ALMOST ALWAYS BEEN THE SMALLER FIGHTER IN THIS DIVISION.

The Ring: Your professional debut was at 139 pounds [Editor's note: Canelo was 15 years old at the time], and during your career you've faced contenders from welterweight to light heavyweight.

CA: I'm all about challenges in my career. I've shown it. I don't need to say much or talk a lot. My record speaks for itself, and that makes me very proud, because in the end, my accomplishments will remain in boxing history. It will be very hard for someone to achieve what I've achieved. However, I hope that if someone does it, it's a Mexican, so we can feel proud. But again, I feel very proud of my accomplishments.

The Ring: I spoke with several Mexican boxing legends for an article in this issue, and they all agree that you're a role model for young fighters in how you handle financial matters and how you've managed your career. Several Mexican legends had money stolen by managers and promoters or poorly managed their careers and finances.

CA: In that sense, I think I'm a turning point, and I can teach the new generation how things should be handled in boxing – who should make the decisions, who should earn the most money, how to take care of yourself and your career, how to do things right. It's important to leave a good lesson for those coming after me. They're the most important. The next generation of fighters need to understand that they must manage themselves and earn well. It's not about risking your life in the ring for nothing. At the start of my career, I boxed and sacrificed because I love what I do, but in the end, there has to be a reward. Effort and reward go hand in hand.

Now, if after my retirement I decide to stay in boxing, I'd love to help the new generation, help them and teach them the full movie of what boxing really is – how to behave, how to manage themselves, teach them to save, to understand boxing comprehensively, to get involved in negotiations and everything behind them, everything a fight implies. They shouldn't just focus on fighting and leave everything to others. They shouldn't get used to just fighting and receiving money without asking or getting involved, doing the same thing repeatedly. Most fighters only ask how much they'll make, and that's it, over and over again. They don't get involved. In the end, history says it: Many great fighters have ended up broke because all they cared about was throwing punches and fighting.

The Ring: How important is good behavior outside the ring as a human being? Many people consider you a role model.

CA: I don't know. I've never wanted people to see me as a role model. I've always tried to just be myself, never pretending, never acting like this or that. Just being who I am. Obviously my family, 'Chepo' and Eddy Reynoso have always supported me, and I've learned a lot from them, but I've never done anything so people would speak well of me or see me as a role model. This Canelo you're seeing is the real Canelo. What is true is that I don't let anyone disrespect me, but I also don't talk about anyone, I don't criticize anyone, I don't take merit away from anyone. I'm a person who focuses on what I have, because I believe if you focus on what others have, you'll always be unhappy. I never say "Look, he's earning more," "Look, he's doing more." If I focused on what others are doing, I'd be very unhappy and would have never achieved anything. Because with that attitude, you're not focused on your own stuff; you're focused on what others are doing. That's why I believe focusing on myself is what has brought me to where I am today. So I focus on what I love, on what I do, and on being happy. That's why I believe I am who I am, nothing more, nothing less.

Sarah Stier

Canelo and GGG shared 36 rounds, with the former ahead 2-0-1 in their trilogy.

The Ring: Crawford had some trouble during his fight with Israil Madrimov, and you've taken big shots from guys like Gennadiy Golovkin, Sergey Kovalev, Dmitry Bivol and Daniel Jacobs. Will Crawford withstand your power? Are you concerned about Crawford's power?

CA: I don't know if he'll handle my power. We'll see on September 13. We'll see. He's a fighter who moves very well in the ring, knows how to box, but whether he'll handle my power, I don't know. We'll see. And regarding whether I'm concerned about his power, I take everyone very seriously, because I believe that if you let your guard down, even a kid can hurt you. In the end, the punch that hurts you is the one you didn't expect. Therefore, we're going to train 100% for Crawford's style and, as always, arrive at 100%.

The Ring: Are you concerned about Crawford's great boxing skills?

CA: The truth is, I wouldn't say I'm concerned – that's not the right word. Obviously, as a team, we're going to train, understanding who Crawford is. The camp will be prepared specifically for his style. We know his style. But somehow, we're going to figure him out. We'll find a way to connect and win the fight. I hope we deliver a great fight and that the best man wins.

The Ring: Do you consider Crawford the most complete fighter you've faced so far?

CA: Yes, I think he has all the tools as a fighter. He's a great fighter, and in terms of skills, I think he's the best.

The Ring: Crawford is ambidextrous. How much will your experience from fights like the one against Erislandy Lara help you face Crawford?

CA: I believe that everything I've lived through has prepared me for each of the fights I've headlined. I've fought the best in the world. I've faced fights

David Becker

Canelo knocked out the much smaller Amir Khan in spectacular fashion.

of all styles, and that has prepared me for all the fights I have ahead, including this one against Crawford. Everything before has surely helped, especially for this upcoming fight.

The Ring: Crawford tried to get into your head, and I think in the end, you got into his, especially during The G.O.A.T.S. Podcast when you questioned the level of his opposition. What do you think about him calling Ricky Burns and Viktor Postol "elite"?
CA: (laughs) I give real facts. At the end of the day, I'm not lying. He hasn't faced elite fighters. That doesn't mean he's not a great fighter. I'm not taking anything away from him, but if we compare career to career and the opponents each of us has faced, he has no arguments. As for Ricky Burns, I don't remember ever seeing him fight. And as for Viktor Postol, I remember him because many years ago, he went to the gym where I trained in Guadalajara and did sparring with some guys from Guadalajara, and that's how I know him. But that's all I remember.

The Ring: Physically you've maintained yourself very well, and being in your 30s, you have great accumulated experience. How do you feel physically and mentally?
CA: Look, if I were to compare myself with the Canelo of 25, 26 or 27 years old, this Canelo would beat that younger Canelo. So I don't think we need to delve too much into this topic. I repeat: This Canelo would beat the Canelo of 26, 27 or 28 years old. I feel at my best. I have great experience based on the big fights I've had. All of them have been great and have given me enormous experience, and I declare myself ready for what's coming.

The Ring: How do you see the battle between the corners? Eddy Reynoso does not want to lose to Brian McIntyre.
CA: The important thing is to win. Crawford's trainer isn't the important thing. The victory is what matters most. The goal for us as a team is to win. We're very motivated for this fight. Believe me, we're going to prepare thoroughly. We'll prepare as always, but we're going to give an extra push because we obviously know this is a very important fight. And yes, Eddy is just as enthusiastic and motivated as I am. We're going all in.

The Ring: What's your biggest motivation for this fight? Is it the money or something else?
CA: Obviously everything this fight represents. It's a very big and historic fight. It means a lot for my career and my record. But what has brought me to where I am today is the desire to write my name in golden letters in the history of world boxing. The money obviously comes along with it. It's a consequence. But I never imagined I'd be earning what I'm earning, financially speaking. What I've always done was out of love for boxing, for love of what I do. But in the end, everything goes hand in hand. I always tell young people: Always do what you love, give your all, dedicate yourself 100% without thinking about money first. In the end, if you give yourself fully, the money comes on its own and more than you can imagine. I've done everything out of love for boxing, and this fight is no exception. Because if we're talking about money, I don't need money. In the end, I still love what I do, I still enjoy it, and if a big fight like this comes with a lot of money, obviously I'm going to take advantage of it. Who wouldn't? Those who speak badly of me, criticizing my career, my life and my earnings and saying I only fight for money obviously do it out of envy. Who wouldn't want to be in my position? Those who criticize me would love to be in my position. So let's not play dumb. All those who say I only fight for money would love to be where I am. So they better shut up, because they look really bad.

The Ring: You're no longer competing for a place in Mexican boxing. Today you fight for a place among the greatest in history. However, give me three names of Mexican boxing legends among whom you probably already belong.
CA: I wouldn't like to say that I'm already among the legends, because immediately people would criticize me. As soon as I say something, they start criticizing me, saying that I'm just including myself on that list. I wouldn't like to put myself in that list. I think we should wait until I retire and then look at the numbers, the fights I've had, the opponents I've beaten, the titles at stake, the championships I've won and what I've done in boxing. What I've achieved in boxing will be very hard for someone else to achieve. What's the point of having many fights? Having many fights is not what matters. What matters is the type of fights, the type of opponents, what I've conquered. But let's wait until I retire, and then we'll talk about my historical ranking.

The Ring: A few years ago, you told me you'd retire at 37. Are you still thinking of retiring at 37?
CA: Yes, definitely yes. I'm going to retire at 37, and that's still the plan. For now, I'm enjoying whatever little or much time I have left in boxing, but enjoying the moment 100%. I already have other goals outside boxing – bigger goals. I'll continue enjoying what's left, but I repeat: That's the plan – retire at 37.

The Ring: Is there anyone who can replace Canelo as the face of boxing?
CA: We don't know yet. I still have a few more years left. We'll see who emerges. But what I can assure you is that I'll work to support young Mexican fighters so that it's a Mexican who replaces me. RING

THE REDEEMER

THROUGH BOXING, **TERENCE CRAWFORD** ESCAPED THE PERILS OF NORTH OMAHA'S STREETS AND PUNCHED HIS WAY TO BECOMING HIS CITY'S GREATEST CHAMPION

By Vershan Jackson

Nebraska is a proud state. All of its towns and cities were built on a strong work ethic rooted in the pioneering spirit of farming communities. The people here are earnest, grounded and not afraid to get their hands dirty – especially those destined for greatness.

The city of Omaha, in particular, is the birthplace of an eclectic group of high achievers.

Malcolm X was born here. So were legendary entertainers, from Fred Astaire to Marlon Brando to Nick Nolte. Giants of business and industry – including Warren Buffett, who's lived in the same house in town since the 1950s – call Omaha home.

Hall of fame athletes do, too. Former heavyweight champion Max Baer, baseball great Wade Boggs and fan-favorite pro wrestlers Sting (aka Steve Borden) and "The Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase (born Theodore Marvin Willis).

You can call these Omaha natives visionaries, innovators, icons, mavericks.

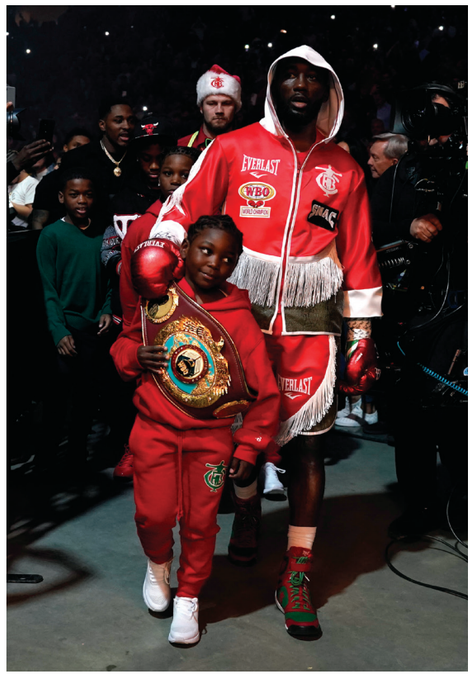
But the citizens here would put it another way:

Winners come from Omaha.

As a co-captain of the University of Nebraska's three-time national championship football team from 1993 to 1997 (60 wins, three losses, national titles in '94, '95 and '97) and a native of Omaha, I know a thing or two about winning – and winning streaks. But 1997 was our last championship, and long gone are the winning ways of our storied football program. The last 10 years have been especially hard on Nebraskans. It's been a time of misery, heartache, disappointment and missed opportunities resulting in a dismal record of 54 wins and 70 losses for the once mighty Cornhuskers.

But during this gloomy period, there has been one bright spot, one glimmer of hope that Nebraskans can be proud of – and he hails from Omaha.

Against all odds, Terence "Bud" Crawford has emerged as the greatest individual champion the state has ever produced – and he's poised to add to his legacy on September 13. There's no doubt in my mind that he will beat Canelo Alvarez. I don't say this out of Omaha pride (although I'm as proud as they come). I say that because I knew the boy before I came to know the man who became the champion.



Crawford makes his way to the ring to face David Avanesyan in Omaha.

My first encounter with Bud was at the CW Boxing Club in 2001. After a short NFL career with Seattle and Kansas City and having earned my college degree, I was looking to resurrect my career. Boxing drills had always been part of my training to keep my hands and feet quick. I had been a member of CW Boxing Club from age 10 to 12. It was there I learned to never judge a book by its cover. I thought I was tough and asked to spar with a scrawny-looking white kid. Let's just say he retired me from any boxing aspirations at the tender age of 12. My twin brother, Antoine, was mad and tried to avenge me – same outcome.

However, while we would never be boxers, we couldn't walk away from the training. My mom wanted us to know how to defend ourselves, and she was friends with Midge Minor, the head coach and founder of CW Boxing, which has saved countless young men's lives in Omaha through boxing. So I walked back into the gym and eventually trained with Brian "BoMac" McIntyre.

Years later, I saw a different little thin kid working on the speed bag. I was impressed by how he pushed himself and asked BoMac about him. "He'll be world champion one day," he said matter-of-factly.

I laughed of course – BoMac loves to joke around. But there was a seriousness in his face that made me say, "Really?" His answer: "Just watch."

I'd known BoMac since I was 14. He worked as a chef at Clark's Café, where my brother and I were dishwashers. I knew he wasn't joking. Over the next few years, that line matured well as Bud took the amateurs by storm, eventually compiling a 58-12 record.

I had fallen out of touch with Bud for a few years, but in 2006, I witnessed a pivotal moment that I believe fueled his professional ambition.

Omaha hosted the National Golden Gloves tournament that year. In the span of four days, Bud took on and beat the best amateur lightweights in the country – until the finals. I was in attendance and I remember like it was yesterday, him getting robbed in the championship bout, even after knocking his opponent down in the last round. Bud lost on the official scorecards, but BoMac still raised Bud's hand after it was announced and the crowd inside the Qwest Center cheered. That moment was the birth of an Omaha legend. It lit a fire in Bud to dominate every opponent and never leave it to the judges again – a true "Mamba mentality" that pushed him when he was an unknown pro prospect all the way to his unexpected HBO debut against Breidis Prescott in March 2013.

Ed Zurga

Eric Francis

Hometown fans showed up to see Crawford take down Jose Benavidez.

Fast-forward one year. Bud ventured to the lion's den in Scotland to face Ricky Burns as an unproven contender. He returned to Omaha as the WBO lightweight champion.

Now it was time for him to really prove himself. On HBO. In Omaha. At the CenturyLink Center (formerly the Qwest Center, now the CHI Health Center), an 18,000-seat stadium. It was packed for his first title defense, which would not be a "gimme." HBO and Top Rank, Bud's promoter at the time, rolled the dice against Yuriorkis Gamboa, an undefeated Cuban Olympic gold medalist with explosive speed and power (and a cocky attitude to go with those gifts).

The city rallied behind Bud at the CHI Center. This was the biggest fight of his career at the time. I was front row as Bud systematically broke Gamboa down. But in the ninth round, Bud dropped his hands and got rocked by the Cuban's lightning-fast hands. Adversity had entered the ring. But like the champion he is, Bud adjusted and knocked out Gamboa that very same round.

That's when I truly became Bud Crawford's No. 1 fan – at least in my mind. That's when I realized he was still that same scrawny but defiant kid from CW Boxing Club. From that fight on, I watched Bud defy the odds, going undefeated for his next 17 fights over nine years. He was often underrated or overlooked during this streak, but in Omaha, he was always the favorite.

When he invaded the welterweight division in 2018, the boxing world propped up Keith Thurman, Shawn Porter, Danny Garcia (an amateur rival of Bud's) and 2012 Olympian Errol Spence Jr. as potential opponents. But to us, it was never "if" he'd win these fights – it was "when."

The moment of truth came on July 29, 2023. Crawford put his WBO title on the line against unified beltholder Spence for the undisputed welterweight championship. The media said it was the fight of a generation. Experts called it 50/50. Las Vegas oddsmakers labeled it a toss-up. Omaha knew what would happen.

I watched that fight with the intensity of a coach watching his last game. Every punch was a message. Every dodge a reminder of Bud's ring IQ. Three knockdowns later, Bud had

done what no man before him had – he'd become the first male boxer in the four-belt era to be undisputed in two weight classes. He didn't just win – he dominated.

As the referee stepped in, Omaha erupted. I could hear it through my phone, through my window, in my soul. Fireworks. Cheers. Pride. Bud had done what Nebraska football hadn't in decades – he united us.

That day he became a household name and restored respect back to a city rich in greatness.

One day, not long after the Spence fight, while we were RC racing at Bud Crawford Speedway, I asked Bud what made him great. He said it's his team.

Being part of what many called the best team in college football (the 1995 Nebraska program), I knew there are many parts that make up a winning squad, and when everyone plays their part to the best of their abilities, championships happen! I had to know from Bud's closest and most trusted team members what they thought about him as a man and a boxer. So I tracked down three members of his inner circle – all Omaha natives – and asked them about Bud's early years.

The first was Steven Nelson, a super middleweight contender who trains with BoMac and has known Bud for more than 25 years.

"The streets of Omaha made him," Nelson told me. "I always feared those same streets would consume him or destroy him like so many other young men over the years, but boxing saved him from that. Boxing kept him away from gangs and drugs, but the streets is where he gets that edge you see in the ring.

"We're super competitive in Omaha. And Bud's the most competitive person I've ever known. He's competitive with everything. You can't challenge him in anything – basketball, football, wrestling, racing, bowling, ping-pong, whatever – because the contest will never end. He makes other competitive people give up, because Bud is going to play you until he beats you.

"We love that attitude here. We love sports and we love winning. We want to win at everything, but we know we have to earn it. Nobody is coming to Omaha looking for the next best anything. We know we're not getting the opportunities that bigger cities get. Omaha people have to strive to get to greatness. That's Bud."

I asked Nelson to describe Bud's fighting style.

"Complex," he said. "He can fight and he can box. He's quick, he's got timing, ring smarts and, most importantly, he's got his competitiveness. When you have all of that, how can anyone beat you?"

Nebraska wrestling fans greet Bud at WWE SmackDown in July 2024.

WWE

Next up was Bernie Tha Boxer (aka Bernard Davis), a former amateur standout who now trains fighters and hosts his own YouTube channel. When he was 13, Bernie met a 7-year-old Bud at the gym and has served as a role model in and out of the ring ever since. I asked him if he saw the seed of greatness when Bud was still a kid.

"I don't know if it was greatness, but he always had that dog in him that would not allow him to quit even when someone got the better of him," Bernie said. "I remember him sparring with my brother when he first started boxing. He didn't know how to box yet, had no technique, was getting hit and getting tired, but he wanted to keep going. All the other little boys was scared of him.

"Even when he was a kid, Bud wanted all the smoke. That's why I respected him even though I was older and was already on the amateur circuit."

Bernie said Bud has matured a lot over the years.

"I remember him losing a bout in a tournament and watching [future three-time Olympian] Rau'shee Warren win it," he said. "That was a wake-up call for him. He decided who he really was and understood that he needed to learn technique and the art of boxing. That's when he really started working hard and being the last one out of the gym."

Even after he dedicated himself to the sweet science, Bud still had a street mentality, according to Bernie.

"Just after he turned pro, we were at an exclusive amateur boxing function in Omaha. He told me if he saw Floyd Mayweather Jr. or anyone with The Money Team here with all the money they like to show off, he would rob them. I asked him why would he say something like that or even think that, and he told me that it just pissed him off the way Floyd flaunts his money around people who don't have it. Bud's really a good kid; he was just brought up tough. Everybody in his family is tough."

Finally, I spoke to BoMac, the head trainer and, in my opinion, the glue that holds the entire team together.

"I knew Bud was the one after I saw how he handled losing at a very early age," BoMac said. "He would get beat and he'd want to fight that kid over and over 'til he won.

"I didn't have to make him train hard or keep him focused. He was self-motivated, especially after a loss. When he lost a fight, he would go back and watch the tape to see why. That made my job easy.

"But I was still nervous for him when we'd go to the big national tournaments and he'd be in with guys from Ohio, Michigan, Texas, California – all those hotbeds for amateur boxing. Nebraska was all about football, not boxing. We didn't have a boxing culture to boast about until Bud came along. Bud beat the best boxers from every hotbed – easily! – when he was 13 years old. That's when I knew he was destined to be a champion.

"When we didn't get the nod at the U.S. Olympic Trials [losing to eventual 2008 Olympic representative Sadam Ali], I knew we had hit the ceiling in the amateurs. It was just like at the Golden Gloves. It was time to turn pro."

"BOXING KEPT HIM AWAY FROM GANGS AND DRUGS, BUT THE STREETS IS WHERE HE GETS THAT EDGE YOU SEE IN THE RING."

BoMac said the toughest thing he and Bud had to overcome occurred early in Bud's pro career.

"When he got shot at a dice game, that happened just before his ESPN debut," BoMac recalled. "He was 8-0, not signed to a big promoter yet, so he needed the exposure. I was like, 'What the fuck?' The bullet just grazed him, but it hit his head! And Bud still wanted to fight!

"But he had to miss that opportunity, and that made him want to win more. He also had to learn that the people he was hanging out with and the streets are not more important than his boxing career."

Bud learned that lesson and his bond with BoMac grew stronger, but that doesn't mean their relationship isn't challenging at times.

"It's a business partnership, but we're like family," said BoMac. "One day he's like my son, the next day he's like my enemy. He will pop off at the mouth with me and I have to let him know that I'm too old to be playing around. Sometimes you have to tell him when his skirt is showing. I'm an old-school trainer, and part of that is telling it like it is to your fighter."

BoMac is keeping it real with his fighter's latest challenge. It's not going to be business as usual with Canelo.

"I told him, 'You have to approach this like this is your last fight ever. There is no rematch for another 100 million dollars. There is no next fight.'

"Bud understands that. The whole team understands that."

Bud's teammates tell a story of a boy who became a man who became Omaha's champion.

Can Bud do the unthinkable? If he beats Canelo Alvarez, is he one of the greatest boxers ever? What else is left to do?

My dream is to see Bud fight Floyd Mayweather Jr. in an exhibition bout at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln in front of all the Cornhuskers fans. I know it sounds crazy and I know I'm getting ahead of myself, but I think we could get 90,000 to show up for that.

But the reality is that in Canelo, Bud is facing the best boxer he has ever faced – and that's without factoring in him jumping up two weight classes.

So why am I so confident in Bud? Because he never forgot where he came from. Because greatness doesn't start with media hype, fan praise, pound-for-pound lists and multimillion-dollar paydays. It starts in small gyms with dusty floors and people who believe in you before anyone else does.

Bud is the hope Omaha didn't know it still had. And if you ask me who's the greatest to ever come out of Nebraska – not just the best fighter, but the fiercest competitor and the truest champion – there's only one answer:

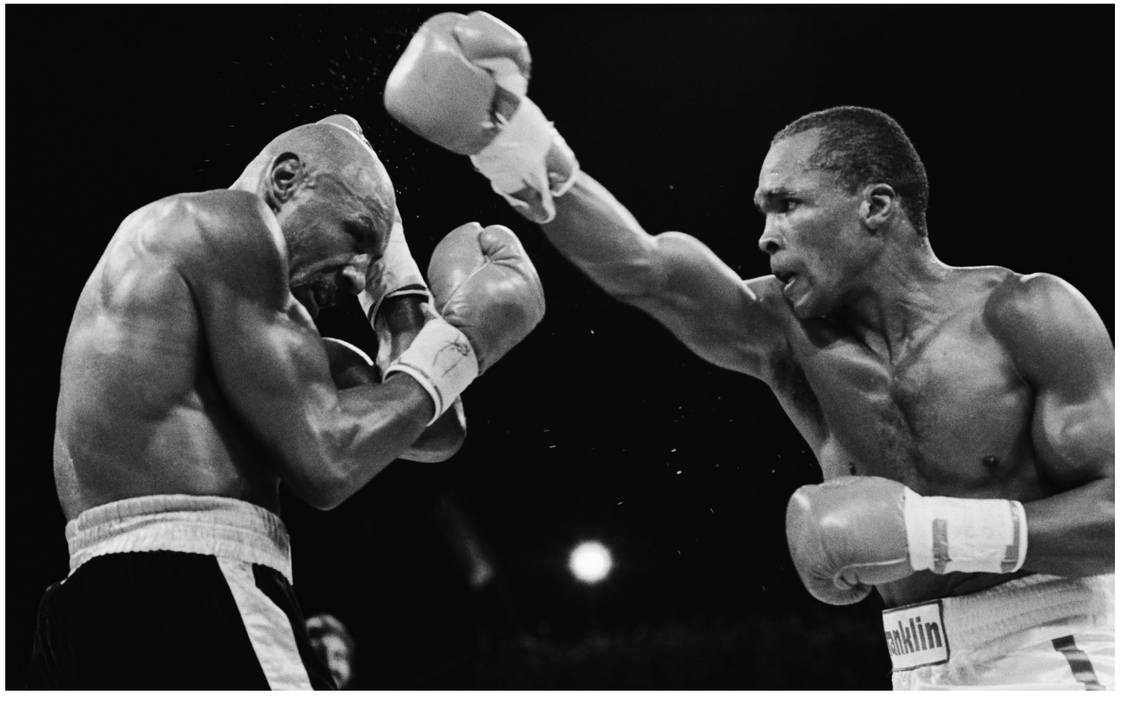
Terence "Bud" Crawford. RING

A NEW LEGEND

IF **CRAWFORD** BEATS **CANELO**, DOES HE JOIN THE PANTHEON OF WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPS WHO DARED TO BE GREAT?

BY WALLACE MATTHEWS

Crawford made his 147-pound debut with a ninth-round stoppage of then-WBO titleholder Jeff Horn.



June 25, 1952, Yankee Stadium, Bronx, New York City:

Sugar Ray Robinson, the reigning middleweight king moving up to challenge Joey Maxim, the world light heavyweight champ, is leading widely on the scorecards after 12 rounds. But three minutes later, his once-magnificent 157½-pound body – now drained and listless – collapses in the 104-degree heat and he is unable to continue, suffering the only stoppage loss in his 199-bout career.

May 31, 1938, Madison Square Garden Bowl, Long Island City, New York:

Henry Armstrong, the world featherweight champion, jumps up two full weight classes to challenge Barney Ross for the welterweight title. Despite giving up nine pounds to his opponent, Homicide Hank manhandles Ross to win the title on a lopsided 15-round decision. Three months later, Armstrong – who weighed 133½ against Ross – will challenge and beat Lou Ambers to add the lightweight title to his unprecedented simultaneous triple crown.

February 9, 1974, Puteaux, Hauts-de-Seines, France:

Jose "Mantequilla" Napoles, having dominated the welterweight division for the previous five years, moves up to challenge Carlos Monzon, the formidable middleweight champion from Argentina. The weight difference is not huge – six pounds – but Monzon's advantages in height, reach and punching power are insurmountable for Napoles, who can't make it off his stool for Round 7.

April 6, 1987, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas:

Sugar Ray Leonard, the former welterweight and junior middleweight champion who has not fought in nearly three years, comes out of retirement to challenge Marvelous Marvin Hagler, who has not lost a fight in 11 years and has defended his middleweight crown 12 times. In a masterful performance, Leonard outthinks, outmaneuvers and outboxes Hagler to win the title on a decision that is still hotly debated nearly four decades later.

Sugar Ray Leonard (above, battling Marvelous Marvin Hagler and, at right, with Crawford in 2018) knows all about shutting down the naysayers .

December 6, 2008, MGM Grand Garden, Las Vegas:

Manny Pacquiao, who began fighting 13 years earlier at 106 pounds but fought his way to titles in five divisions, from flyweight to lightweight, makes the leap to welterweight against Oscar De La Hoya, himself a former lightweight champion. On paper, it looks like a mismatch – at 5-foot-11, De La Hoya dwarfs the 5-foot-5 Pacquiao, and he enjoys a six-inch reach advantage – but on canvas, it is anything but. In a brutally one-sided fight, the ferocious PacMan gobbles up De La Hoya, who doesn't win a single round.

You get the idea. Even for a champion, moving up a weight class can be a humbling and painful experience. For every Henry Armstrong, there is a Sugar Ray Robinson; for every Manny Pacquiao, a Jose Napoles. There's a reason they put fighters on the scale. All else being equal, or at least close to it, the bigger fighter is almost always going to win. The old saying about "a good big man beating a good little man" may be a cliche, but like all cliches, it contains more than a nugget of truth. And like all cliches, the reverse can also be true. Every so often, there is the exception that proves the rule.

That is what makes the upcoming undisputed super middleweight championship bout between Terence "Bud" Crawford, unbeaten in 41 fights and the reigning WBA 154-pound titleholder, and Saul "Canelo" Alvarez, who holds all of the 168-pound belts, even more intriguing than your average long-awaited matchup between two of the world's top pound-for-pound fighters. And even more so when you consider that, despite Crawford's current titleholder status, many observers still think of him as a welterweight, where he made seven defenses of his WBO title and reached undisputed status in the last.

Some version of what Crawford is trying to do has been done successfully by Armstrong, Leonard, Pacquiao and Michael Spinks, to name a few. And it has resulted in disaster for the likes of Robinson, almost everyone's choice as the greatest all-around fighter in history. The same for Napoles, Bob Foster and De La Hoya, who tried his luck as a middleweight against Bernard Hopkins, only to be flattened by a body shot.

"It's not that easy to move up to a higher weight division," said Pacquiao, who conquered eight divisions. "In my experience, you need a minimum of three months to prepare for it."

"Elite is elite," said Roy Jones Jr., the only fighter in history to have fought as light as junior middleweight and eventually win a heavyweight title. "If you're an elite fighter, you can fight in any weight class."

"I don't rule out a Crawford win," said Jim Lampley, the Hall of Fame broadcaster who called Pacquiao's shocking win over De La Hoya. "I wouldn't favor him, but if Sugar Ray Leonard can get a decision over Marvin Hagler, there's no logical reason that says Crawford can't do the same with Canelo."

"I think he's going to get annihilated," said Sean Gibbons, a longtime boxing matchmaker and manager currently guiding the twilight of Pacquiao's career. "The first time he gets hit by Canelo, forget about it. He's getting drilled. Absolutely."

The betting line on the fight tends to support the "good big man" theory. Canelo opened as a 9-5 favorite, generally based on the perceived size difference.

In reality, however, the size difference is not what the scale would make it appear. At a listed 5-foot-8, Crawford is in fact half an inch taller than Canelo. His reach – 74 inches – is unusually long

for a man his height, and it's 3½ inches longer than Canelo's. And to hear Bruce Trampler, the Top Rank matchmaker who worked with Crawford for much of his career, tell it, Crawford is as much as, if not more of a natural middleweight than Canelo.

"He's not really moving up to 168; he's coming down," Trampler said. "I saw him [recently] in Norfolk and he weighed about 175 and he's carrying it well."

On the flip side, it is somewhat mind-boggling to realize that Crawford, at 37, is three years older than Canelo, who seems to have been around forever. Which he has, having turned pro at 15!

"I think they're both on the decline," said Trampler. "Which doesn't mean it can't still be a terrific fight. Think Ali and Frazier in Manila."

(Trampler, it should be noted, was the only insider I spoke to who picked Andy Ruiz to beat Anthony Joshua before their first bout at Madison Square Garden in 2019. He knows his stuff.)

Trampler, for the record, agrees with Lampley that it's not outside the realm of possibility for Crawford to win this fight, and no less an expert on these matters than Jones, who not only scaled the heavyweight peak against John Ruiz but also won titles as a middleweight, super middleweight and light heavyweight, is picking Crawford to win.

"He has a high boxing IQ and he's still hungry," said Jones, implying Canelo may no longer be. "If he can take the shots, he can win this thing."

And as in all matches in which one fighter is moving up, that is the key question.

"For me, the biggest challenge moving up was making sure I could take the punch," Jones said. "I was good at giving it, but taking it – I wasn't sure. I prepared for it by sparring bigger guys, so when I got hit, I wasn't surprised. And they hit me just as hard as I thought they would."

Crawford, who started his career 17 years ago as a lightweight, has yet to face a true super middleweight. In his last bout, he took a step up, from welterweight to junior middle, to face Israil Madrimov, a tough but inexperienced (11 pro fights) Uzbek who not only lasted the distance but lost a very competitive decision. It was the first time in eight years that Crawford had failed to stop his opponent (all of whom were junior welterweights or welterweights), and he was noticeably less aggressive against a bigger man.

"Crawford has been my favorite fighter for a long time," said Hall of Fame trainer Freddie Roach, who was preparing Pacquiao for a comeback bout against Mario Barrios at press time. "But I didn't like what I saw against Madrimov. Maybe it was an off night for him, but if he couldn't move as well because of the added weight, he may have real problems against Canelo, who has a lot of power."

"Crawford has to fight a perfect fight, the way Leonard did against Hagler," Lampley said. "I can't see him knocking out Canelo, but I can see Canelo knocking out Crawford. But if Bud can get in and out the way as Leonard did and find ways to elude Canelo's big shots while scoring with his own, that could be a formula for winning the fight."

So let's say, for argument's sake, that Crawford is able to avoid Canelo's power for 12 rounds and lands enough clean shots of his own to pull out a Leonard-Hagler-like victory.

Where does this land him among the ranks of the all-time greats who were at their best in and around the welterweight division?

Robinson holds a special place among historians, a mystique enhanced by his welterweight reign not being on film. After him, you can rank the following in any order you like: Leonard, De La Hoya, Pacquiao, Armstrong, Napoles, Roberto Duran, Thomas Hearns, Wilfred Benitez, Emile Griffith, Felix Trinidad,

Former titleholder Shawn Porter gave a gallant effort, but Crawford took him out in the 10th round.

Shane Mosley, Kid Gavilan, Carmen Basilio, Pernell Whitaker. Does a win over Canelo Alvarez propel Crawford into that rarified air? If so, who does he displace?

"I can see Crawford in that company," Pacquiao said.

"I don't think he would have beaten Leonard, but it would have been competitive," Trampler said.

Said Lampley: "I'm not willing to say Terence Crawford would be no match for Sugar Ray Leonard any more than I'm willing to say Canelo Alvarez would be no match for Marvelous Marvin Hagler."

"I'm spoiled," said Roach. "I've worked with Manny and Miguel Cotto, so my list of great welterweights begins and ends with them. But if Crawford beats Canelo, he has to be considered one of the greats of his era."

"All-time great? Who has he beat?" Gibbons asked. "Shawn Porter, who was done? Errol Spence? He was dead from that car wreck. Has he beaten any future Hall of Famers? He's a good fighter for what was out there, but he only looks like a monster because the competition was so bad."

"You can't blame Crawford, because no one was around to give him that kind of competition," Jones said. "He's not on that list of great welterweights because of the quality of his opponents. But I do think he would give a good fight to any of them. But it is hard to put him up there because of the caliber of the guys he's fought."

There's no question that Crawford is an excellent fighter. But does he have the hand speed, ring smarts and killer instinct of a Sugar Ray Leonard? Does he have the ferocity of a Duran or the paralyzing right hand of a Thomas Hearns? Has he ever shown the bloodlust of a De La Hoya against Ricardo Mayorga or Fernando Vargas or Ike Quartey? Is he a perpetual whirlwind like Henry Armstrong?

Crawford's first welterweight title defense was a 12th-round TKO win over Jose Benavidez.

One thing Crawford does do exceptionally well is switch effortlessly between left-handed and right-handed stances, although against Madrimov, he stuck to the southpaw stance exclusively for 12 rounds.

"I think when the game is on the line, he's more likely to go southpaw," Lampley said. "I can't remember the last time I saw someone fighting southpaw against Canelo."

Canelo, of course, has never lost to a southpaw, his only defeats coming at the hands of Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Dmitry Bivol in Alvarez's own ill-fated attempt to move up to light heavyweight. He did have some difficulty with southpaws Erislandy Lara and Austin Trout a decade ago, but since then he has stopped lefties James Kirkland and Billy Joe Saunders and easily outpointed John Ryder.

"In my day, we didn't deal with a lot of switch-hitters," Jones said. "So that could work to Crawford's advantage."

Jones is right, of course, that it is not Crawford's fault that he hasn't had a Hearns, a Duran or a De La Hoya to bring out the beast in him. Obviously we would not truly appreciate Leonard's greatness had we not seen him dig deep to stop Hearns in their first fight or frustrate Duran to the point of quitting in their second. We might not fear Hearns so much had we not seen him face-plant Duran and Pipino Cuevas with that terrifying right hand.

Perhaps the Canelo fight is Crawford's opportunity to prove he's not only the best of his era but among the best of any era. Jones, for one, thinks so.

"My top five welterweights are Robinson, Leonard, Duran, Hearns and Benitez," he said. "If Crawford beats Canelo, he definitely goes into that top five. For me, he goes in front of Benitez."

Who are any of us to disagree with Roy Jones Jr.? RING

THE LONG BATTLE FOR RECOGNITION

TERENCE CRAWFORD BELIEVES THAT HE'S NEVER RECEIVED THE RESPECT HE DESERVES. THAT'S JUST ONE OF THE THINGS THAT WILL DRIVE HIM WHEN HE TAKES ON MEXICAN ICON CANELO ALVAREZ IN THEIR SUPERFIGHT

By Tom Gray

The first time I ever laid eyes on Terence Crawford was in March 2013 when he faced Colombian knockout artist Breidis Prescott on the Brandon Rios vs. Mike Alvarado 2 undercard.

I didn't attend the fight, which took place in Las Vegas. I was already covering boxing professionally, but this was one of those nights when a dedicated U.K. fan sets their alarm for 2 a.m. and gets up bleary-eyed to catch some big-fight action from across the Atlantic. It's a process that many of us Brits have gone through dozens of times before and may even be responsible for my coffee addiction.

After Crawford had put the finishing touches on a lopsided 10-round unanimous decision over Prescott, I found myself very impressed by the 25-year-old from Omaha. Not only was the performance excellent, but Crawford had accepted the fight at less than two weeks' notice and moved up to 140 pounds to make it happen.

The motivation was his HBO Boxing debut.

One year later, Crawford was in my home country of Scotland for his first world championship fight. Ricky Burns was the WBO lightweight titleholder, a proven warrior, and he hadn't lost a fight for seven years. While the amiable Scotsman had been very fortunate to retain his title in a contentious draw with Ray Beltran six months earlier, he still presented a significant step up in class for "Bud" Crawford.

At the time, Burns trained just 15 minutes from my home under the guidance of his then-coach, the esteemed Billy Nelson. I was allowed access to the gym once a week, so I was privy to Burns' grueling preparation for what was his ninth world title fight.

When he walked into the gym on a cold Friday morning at the end of a long week of training, I said to him, "Ricky, this guy you're fighting is either really special, or you'll totally expose him. I don't think there's an in-between." Other people's opinions meant little to a man like Burns. He was accustomed to being written off and had torn up the script more than once.

"We'll see," he said with a sardonic smile.

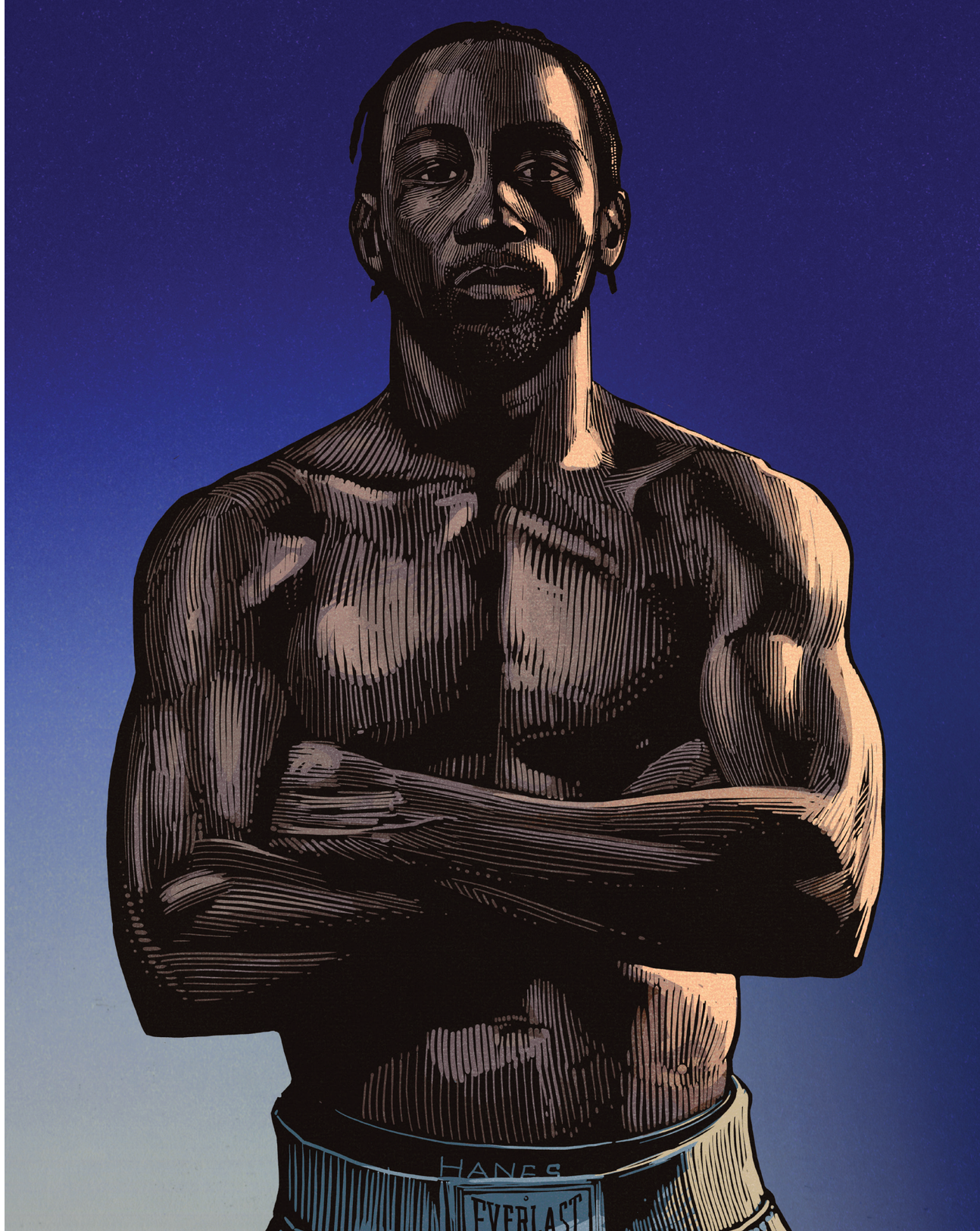


Illustration by Chris Wormell

By the midway point of the Burns vs. Crawford fight, which took place before 10,000 passionate Scots at the SECC Arena in Glasgow, it was clear which of the two scenarios I was watching. Terence Crawford was special. Demonstrating what has become his signature talent, the American switched almost exclusively to the southpaw stance in the middle rounds and pulled away on the scorecards. Burns didn't have any answers and lost a unanimous decision.

A matter of weeks after Crawford had become a world titleholder for the first time, Mexico's Canelo Alvarez unified the WBA, WBC and Ring Magazine junior middleweight championships with a hard-fought 12-round unanimous decision over Austin Trout at the Alamodome in San Antonio. Once again, I was up watching the action in the early hours of the morning in the U.K.

If you'd have told me then that Canelo vs. Crawford would become a reality 11 years later, I'd have spit my coffee across the room. However, Crawford has been the author of his destiny in recent years. He's now a double undisputed world champion and a pound-for-pound great, so you don't tell this man what he can and can't do.

He's already proven that he's special. Now Terence Crawford stands ready to prove that he's even better than that.

The Ring: Before we discuss Mr. Alvarez, I just want to tap into something that has been brought up during the press tour. There was talk about what represents an elite opponent and you mentioned Ricky Burns, for which you received a lot of pushback. I know just how good Ricky Burns was, but can you shed some light on why you regard him so highly?
Terence Crawford: Listen, when I fought Ricky Burns, he was a two-division champion. After I took his title, he went up in weight and became a three-division champion. It's rare for someone to become a one-time champion. For him to be a champion in three different divisions, I think there's a lot of disrespect from those who say he's not a great fighter. You've got fighters being compared to him that were maybe a champion in one division, but they don't give him no credit. I think that's very disrespectful. He may have had some losses, but that don't take away his accolades.

Ricky Burns hadn't lost in seven years before Crawford outpointed him in 2014.

The Ring: Well said! What was the reaction from your family and your team when you said you wanted to fight Canelo Alvarez?
TC: My team believe in anything I believe in. They know me inside and out, and they know how I prepare for a fight. My family was like, "Hey, if that's what you want to do, then just be careful." That was it and we're here now.

There's always a conversation [when it comes to challenges]. What do my team think? What do my family think? Their opinion counts because they've been around me my whole life. They know me in and out of the ring. As a team, we've got to make a decision on the moves we make.

The Ring: There's a lot of motivation going into this fight. This is the biggest fight in boxing, it's another undisputed championship, and it's a career-high payday. What is the number one motivator for you and why?
TC: My number one motivation is winning. It's not about the payday, it's not about the belts, it's about what comes with winning this fight. Everything else is an extra.

Obviously the payday and the belts are great, but this will solidify me as a three-division undisputed world champion. At the same time, to beat an all-time great like Canelo in his weight class, with no stipulations [regarding weight or rehydration clauses], it don't get no bigger than that.

All the odds are stacked against me. I'm the smaller guy coming up in weight. He's the bigger guy who's been knocking out bigger guys. To win a fight that people don't think you're capable of winning means everything.

The Ring: Do you love proving people wrong?
TC: For sure. That's why I train so hard. I've been proving people wrong my whole career. Nobody thought I was going to be this great. Nobody, outside of my hardcore team, would have told you that I was going to be here fighting the biggest fight we've seen in the last 20 years.

The Ring: When you're written off and have something to prove, does that make you even more dangerous?
TC: I think I'm dangerous when I'm the favorite. I never take an opponent lightly. I train like I'm the underdog every single time. Like I said, I've been proving the world wrong for years and always felt the cards were stacked against me. That's my mentality and that's what I'm taking into the ring on September 13.

The Ring: You're moving up two weight classes from where you last performed to fight Canelo. Can you think of a similar weight jump in boxing history that you would compare this to?
TC: I can't compare it to nuthin' because I haven't been in the ring at 168. We shall see.

The Ring: Bernard Hopkins going up two weight classes to beat Antonio Tarver came into my mind, but Hopkins had been a career-middleweight before moving to light heavy, so that's different. The only fight I could think of in the modern era that's kind of close is Oleksandr Usyk fighting Tyson Fury. I know they're in the same division, but Fury had huge physical advantages in a fight where both men were skilled.
TC: I won't use that fight, because Usyk had fought in that division before. I would say Roy Jones against John Ruiz.

The Ring: I thought about that one, but the skill gap was so colossal. I mean, no disrespect intended, but Canelo Alvarez is no John Ruiz.
TC: For sure, but we're talking about weight divisions. I'm talking about a fighter who had never fought in that weight division before. This is more like Roberto Duran going up to fight Marvin Hagler. Those are the types of fights I'd think about.

"MY NUMBER ONE MOTIVATION IS WINNING. IT'S NOT ABOUT THE PAYDAY, IT'S NOT ABOUT THE BELTS, IT'S ABOUT WHAT COMES WITH WINNING THIS FIGHT.EVERYTHING ELSE IS AN EXTRA."

The Ring: Could you break down Canelo for me as a fighter in terms of pluses and minuses?
TC: There ain't a lot of minuses there. The only takeaway someone could say is that he's slow on his feet, but I don't think he cares. He fights to the level of his competition, so when we share the ring, I think we'll get the best version of Canelo Alvarez we've seen in years. But we'll also see the best version of Terence Crawford that we've ever seen, and that makes for a great fight.

The Ring: What's the best version of Canelo you've ever seen?
TC: Man, I've seen him against a lot of fighters. When he fought [Austin] Trout, that was a helluva performance. When he fought Caleb Plant, [Miguel] Cotto, GGG. Those were all great performances, but I'm not worried about that. I'm worried about our fight and what we got coming up.

The Ring: Mexico has a rich boxing tradition. Who is your favorite Mexican fighter and why?
TC: I don't want to say I have a favorite Mexican fighter. I enjoyed watching Marco Antonio Barrera. I enjoyed watching Erik Morales. I enjoyed watching Julio Cesar Chavez. Bam Rodriguez, I like watching him. [Editor's note: Though of Mexican descent, Rodriguez was born in Texas.] Canelo Alvarez, of course, I love watching him. Those are a few names I can say I enjoyed watching in my time in boxing.

The Ring: When Sugar Ray Robinson first won the middleweight title, he weighed 155 pounds, five pounds beneath the weight limit. The weight limit for this fight is 168, but is it in your best interest to go that high?
TC: I'll weigh what I weigh. Whatever my teams feel is best and we'll calculate those things in training. We'll look at what my best performances were [in sparring] and what weight were we at. How does the fighter feel, physically and mentally, at a specific weight? We're going to do our due diligence and work out what weight to come in on fight night.

The Ring: You made a point of there being no rehydration clause for this fight. Why was that important to you?
TC: I don't want no excuses. Looking back at my whole career, there's always been excuses about why I beat this guy or that guy. This guy wasn't in his prime or some type of excuse.

I just want to prove to the world that *I am* great!

The Ring: We know that Canelo will be much bigger on fight night. What do you do that negates that advantage?
TC: I just believe in myself and my abilities. I will go out there and be myself. I know who I am internally. I know what I can do. It don't matter

Eric Francis

Nick Potts - PA Images

what the weight is. It don't matter how big he is. As long as I go out there and be myself, then I'll be just fine.

The Ring: Your performance against Errol Spence was sensational. However, a lot of critics put more focus on Spence being shot or damaged goods than the brilliance of your victory. How does that make you feel when you read this stuff on social media?
TC: This is part of my career and my story. I learned to take it all in. At first, I used to get mad. I'd say, "They don't know what they're talking about!" I'd argue with people on the internet, but you can't change people's opinions.

It's just people who want someone to win so bad, they'll do whatever they can to diminish your victory. They're battling with depression off of a sport. You and the person you fought have gone home to their families and are living a normal life, while some people are still out there stressing about who won and who lost.

The Ring: If you beat Canelo, do you…
TC: When I beat Canelo.

The Ring: My apologies. (laughs) When you beat Canelo, do you envision a similar reaction from critics? What excuses do you think they'd make if you win this fight?
TC: They're going to make some kind of excuse. I honestly believe that anything I do in the ring will not be appreciated. I've been dealing with this for too long to think otherwise.

There's always going to be something. I've been dealing with this after every single one of my fights since I became world champion.

The Ring: When you speak about this, I'm reminded of Marvelous Marvin Hagler. His signature win was Thomas Hearns, but people sometimes forget, that's only two years before his permanent retirement. Up until that win, he didn't feel appreciated. Can you identify with him?
TC: If you don't put yourself out there and adopt the characteristics of other people who are popular or doing certain things, then people tend to not support you as much as a braggadocious, flashy-type guy.

If you're humble and try to do everything right and you're respectful [then it goes against you]. People want to see controversy, they want to see the lifestyle, they want to see what car you drive, they want to see what type of girl you have, what brand you wear, what kind of jewelry you got, your houses – they want to see all that.

If they can't get into your personal space, then they say, "Ah, this dude ain't nuthin!" They'll say, "He don't talk stuff and he don't have no personality!" They build up this character that they perceive you to be because they can't get into your space or your circle. Your circle knows the different sides of you, but if you don't put that out there so that they can suck out all the energy, then people just push the negatives. If you don't feed into that, then they'll continue with that narrative.

The Ring: Canelo has a lot of weapons, but a signature shot is the left hook. We never hear about Terence Crawford having a signature shot, I think because you switch and punch good with both hands, so it's difficult to pigeonhole a single punch. However, can you discuss your lead hand, your right hand, when you're in the southpaw position? You vary that shot up brilliantly, from befuddling Spence with the jab to stunning Kell Brook by using it as a power shot. Kell didn't even know what he'd been hit with.
TC: It's something that's been practiced in the gym, over and over. You practice different types of jab, using different angles. At that particular time [against Brook], he happened to be coming forward, which made a bigger impact than it would have been had I just jabbed at him.

To be honest, my best punch is the one that land. (laughs)

The Ring: You're fighting the No. 1 boxing attraction in Las Vegas on Mexican Independence Weekend. What goes through your head when I mention the word "judges"?
TC: We don't control the judges, it's neutral, and at the same time, I can't focus solely on the judges. I don't want to take away from my preparation by thinking about not getting a fair shake.

As I've said before, I'm behind the starting line and he's already ahead of the starting line. I know what I've got to do. I know what I'm up against. That's why we're going to put the work in to make sure that we do it the right way and get the victory.

The Ring: In your mind's eye, how does this fight play out? What do you see?
TC: I see victory. I'm looking for whatever fight I need to fight. Whatever fight he brings to the table, I'm going to make my adjustments, dissect what he does, and come up with a plan inside the ring to beat him.

When we're in the ring, the dynamic of the fight is going to switch. Canelo is a thinking man, he's got experience, so I don't expect him to come in and fight one style. He's going to be calculated, make his adjustments, and do things to throw me off. It's not going to be the same fight from start to finish. We'll have a great fight and put on a great show.

The Ring: You've got a big family, a beautiful family. When your career is over, would you just put your feet up and enjoy life, or would you stay in boxing in some capacity?
TC: I'll definitely be involved in the sport, being that I've got a boxing gym, a nonprofit organization. I've got the fighters in the gym; the professionals that my team help coach, so I'll definitely be involved. RING

David Avanesyan can confirm Crawford's body-punching abilities.

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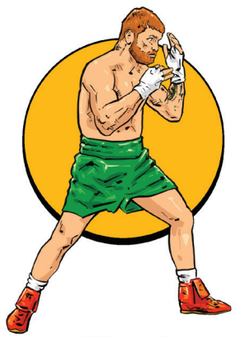
د.سليمان الحبيب
DR SULAIMAN AL HABIB
medical group المجموعة الطبية

THE RING



UNDISPUTED
THE CANELO STORY

ROAD TO COLLISION

LO PEOR QUE TE PUEDE SUCEDER

ES QUE TE VALGA MADRE ¡PERDER!

"CHEPO REYNOSO, FILOSOFO MOYAHUENSE"

JULIAN MAGDALENO GYM

FE - ILUSION - DECISION

BOXING NO LIFE SQUAD

THE RING

BOXING NO LIFE SQUAD

BIG TIME CREATIVE SHOP

KRONK AAA

EL NIÑO EN BUSCA DE LA GLORIA

Un regalo de su hermano marcó el destino del ahora famoso boxeador mexicano Saúl 'Canelo' Álvarez

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA. ALLEGIANT STADIUM. SEPTEMBER 13, 2025.

THE ARENA SHAKES WITH NOISE.

WELCOME TO Fabulous LAS VEGAS NEVADA

allegiant stadium

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THIS IS THE MOMENT WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR...

ONE MORE WALK.

ONE MORE WAR.

CANELO

THIS IS WHY I DO THIS.

YEARS OF WORK FOR NIGHTS LIKE THIS.

THIS ISN'T JUST ANOTHER FIGHT. THIS IS LEGACY.

YOU NEVER FOUGHT ANYONE LIKE ME, CRAWFORD!

THIS IS MY MOMENT. TONIGHT, I REMIND EVERYONE WHO I AM...

... AND WHERE I COME FROM.

GUADALAJARA, MEXICO.

25 YEARS AGO.

HEY! REDHEAD!!

PELIRROJO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE...?

FRECKLE FACE!

#&!! @..!!

NEVER BACK DOWN.

HIT BACK.

ALWAYS.

HARDER!!

MY FAMILY MADE ME WHO I AM.

OH MIJO! YOU'LL SEE, MY BOY. ONE DAY, YOU'LL UNDERSTAND. YOU ARE SOMEONE SPECIAL.

I KNOW YOU WERE BORN FOR *GREATNESS!*

2003

MY FAMILY SHOWED ME THE WAY.

DON CHEPO, THIS IS MY LITTLE BROTHER I TOLD YOU ABOUT.

HE WANTS TO LEARN.

HE CAN FIGHT!

AND I FOUND A SECOND FAMILY.

VERY GOOD! FASTER NOW!!

I FELL IN LOVE WITH BOXING...

... AND WINNING!

2005

FIRST PRO FIGHT IN TONALÁ...

... AND FIRST PRO WIN.

NOTHING CAN STOP ME!

ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!

FIRST WORLD TITLE IN 2011

TWO-DIVISION WORLD CHAMPION IN 2015

FOURTH DIVISION IN 2019

I FIGHT FOR LEGACY.

I FIGHT FOR MY PEOPLE.

VIVA MEXICO

CABRONEEEEEEE!

FIRST UNDISPUTED 168 POUNDS CHAMPION IN 2021!

I FIGHT FOR MEXICO.

I KNOW THE FIGHT EVERYONE WANTS!

SO...

CRAWFORD, GET READY!

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER!!

TWO-TIME UNDISPUTED SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT WORLD CHAMPION IN 2025!!

SEPTEMBER IS NOW.

TODAY IS THE DAY.

YES, TONIGHT I REMIND EVERYONE WHO I AM!

I FIGHT FOR MY FAMILY. FOR MY ROOTS. FOR RESPECT!

TONIGHT I FIGHT FOR MY NAME. FOR MY BLOOD.

MY PAST IS MY FUEL. I WAS BORN FOR THIS!

VAMOS!!

VAMOS!!

CANELO! CANELO!

CANELO! CANELO!

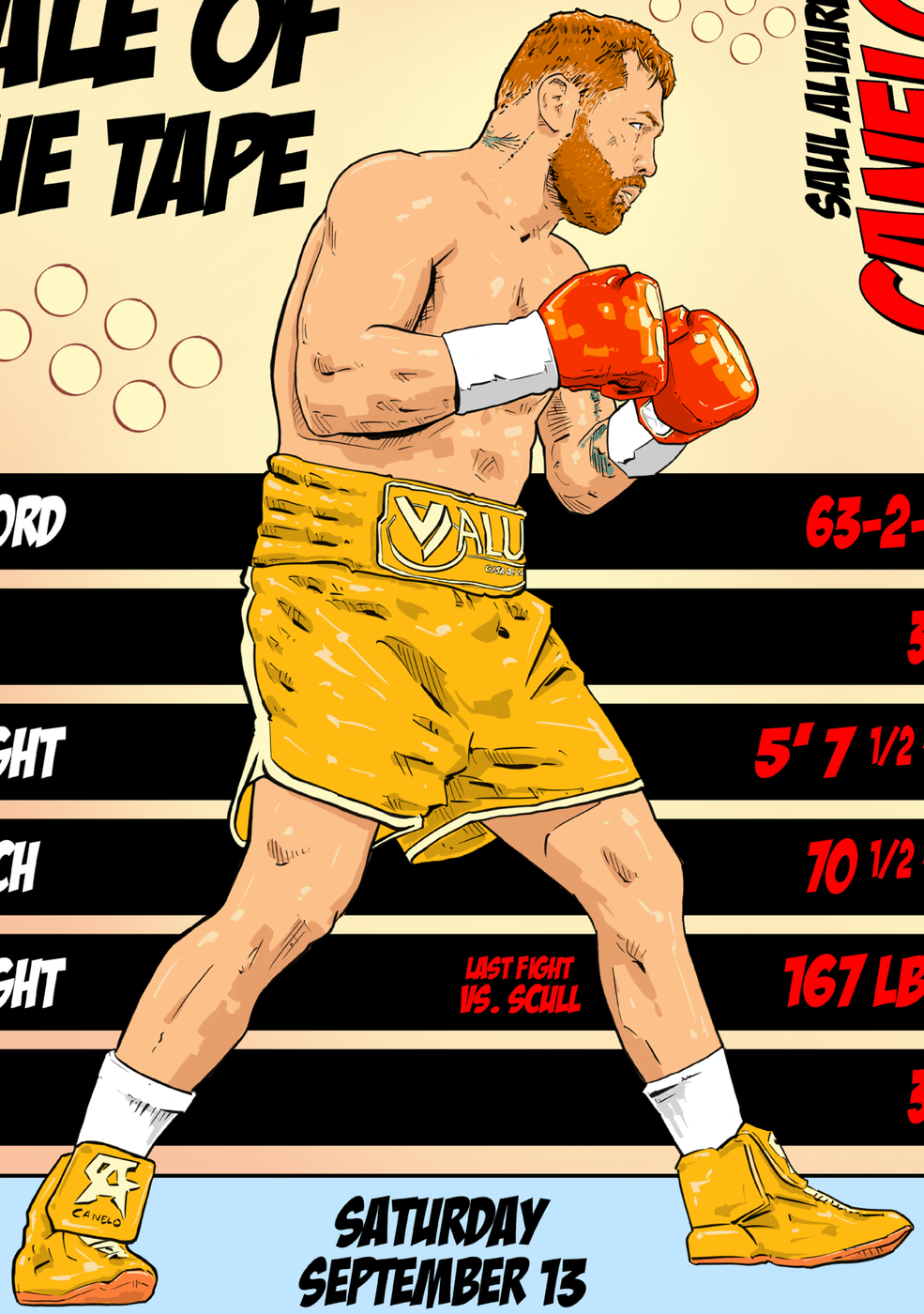
TALE OF THE TAPE

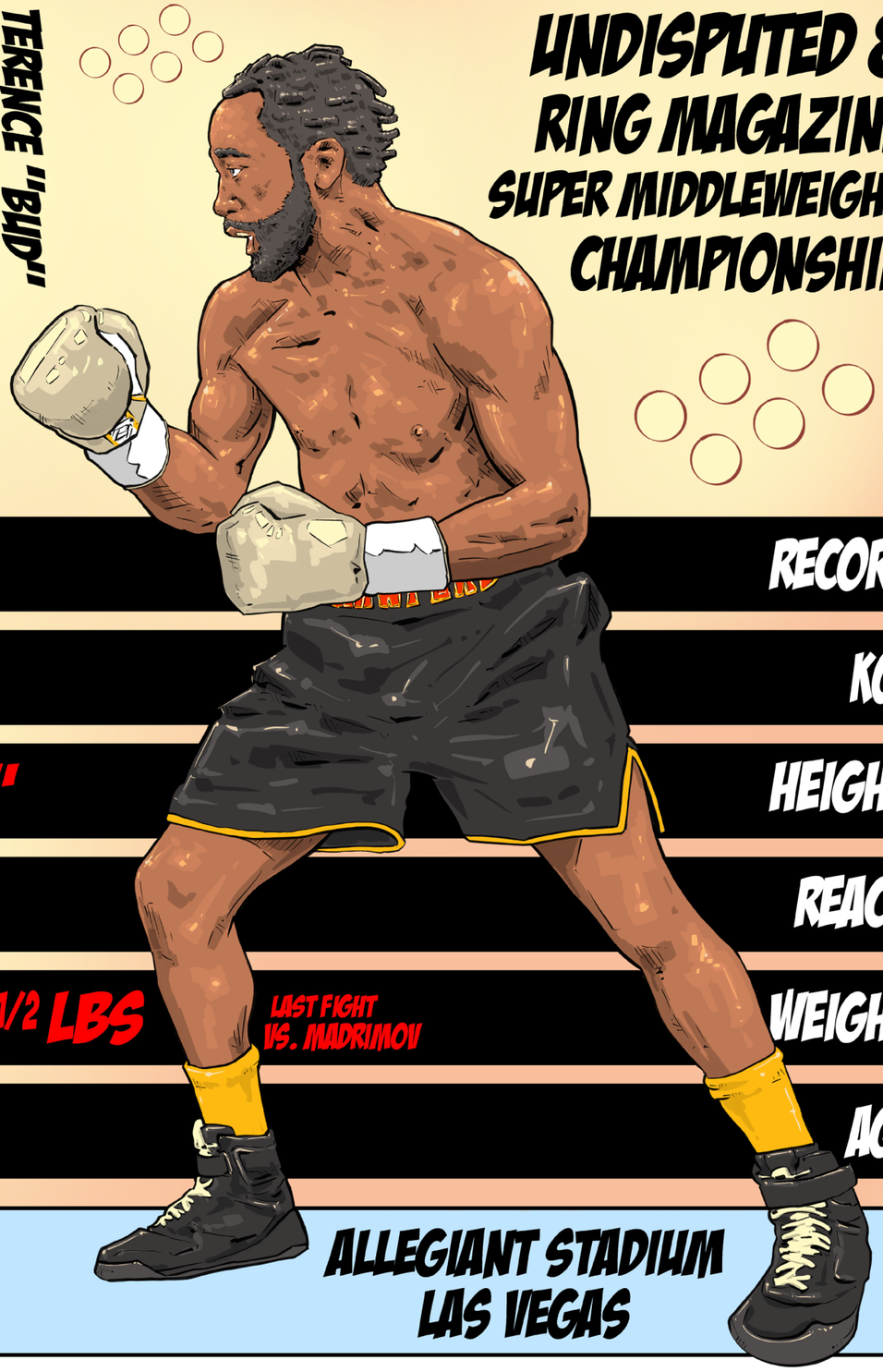
SAUL ALVAREZ CANELO

TERENCE "BUD" CRAWFORD

UNDISPUTED & RING MAGAZINE SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

	CANELO	CRAWFORD
RECORD	63-2-2	41-0
KOs	39	31
HEIGHT	5' 7 1/2"	5' 8"
REACH	70 1/2"	74"
WEIGHT	167 LBS	153 1/2 LBS
LAST FIGHT	VS. SCULL	VS. MADRIMOV
AGE	35	37





SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 13

ALLEGIANT STADIUM LAS VEGAS

NHC

The Largest

Developer of Destinations
in the Middle East

nhc.sa

THE RING

UNDISPUTED

THE BUD CRAWFORD STORY

ROAD TO COLLISION

Larimore Av

Terence "Bud" Crawford St

OMAHA

STOP

BIGTIME CREATIVE SHOP
KRONKAAART

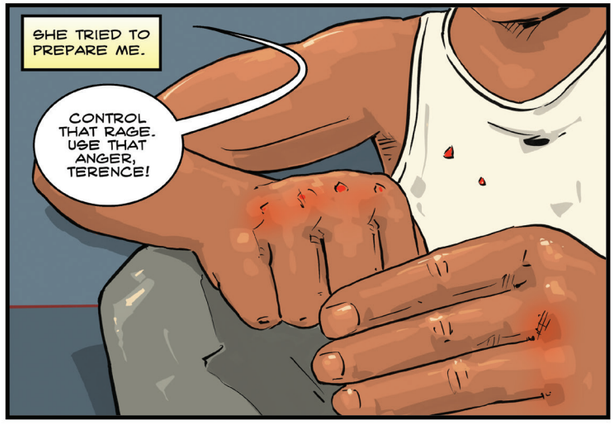
NEBRASKA
... the good life
Home of Arbor Day
THE RING
BIG TIME CREATIVE SHOP
KRONK AAA
Omaha
CW YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER
1510 CASS STREET
934-9875

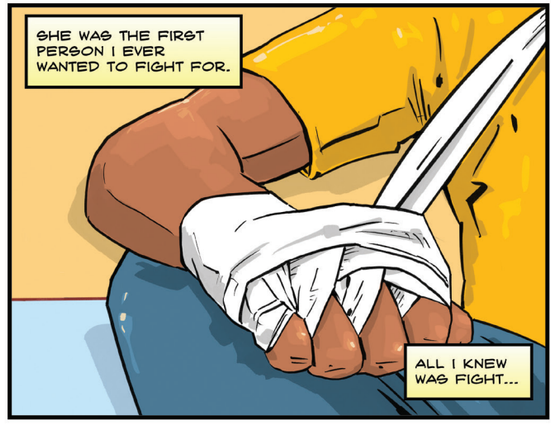
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA. ALLEGIANT STADIUM. SEPTEMBER 13, 2025.
THE BEAT HITS. THE CROWD IS LOUD.
allegiant stadium
AND NOW, MAKING HIS WAY TO THE RING...
... THE CHALLENGER...
... TERENCE 'BUD' CRAWFOOOOOOOORD!!
WELCOME TO Fabulous LAS VEGAS NEVADA
THEY CHEER NOW.
THEY USED TO DOUBT.
THEY SAID I WOULDN'T GET HERE.
I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE HERE...

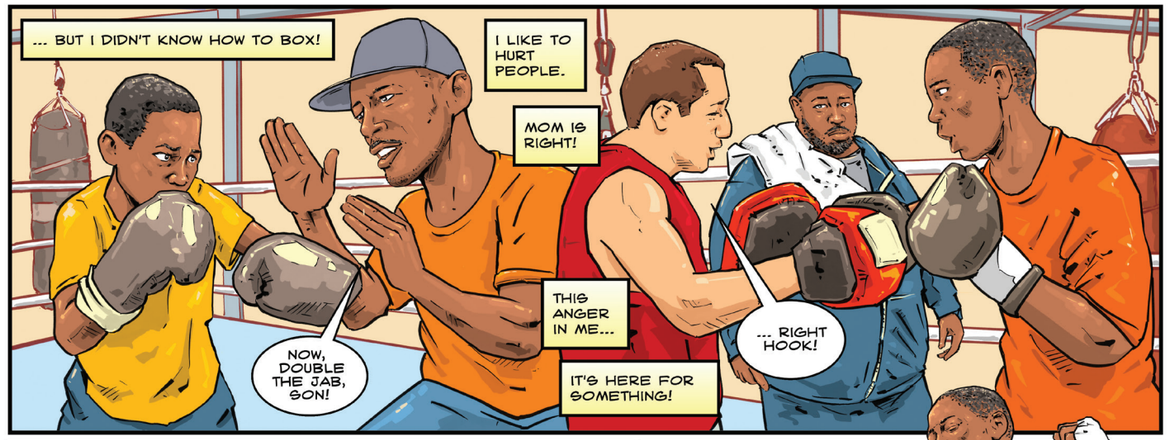
NORTH OMAHA, NEBRASKA.
30 YEARS AGO.
OMAHA IS HOME.

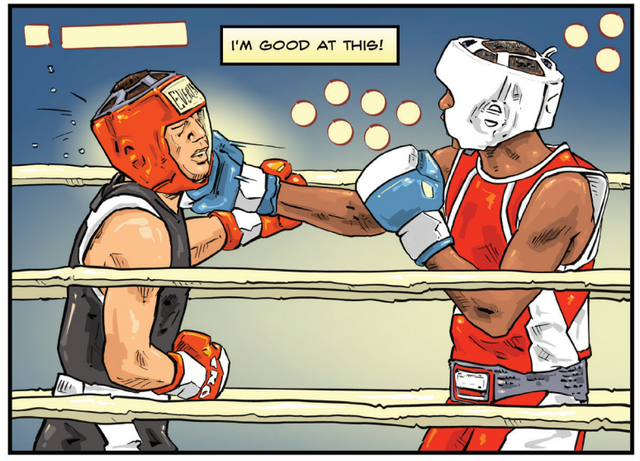
LARIMORE STREET. FIGHTING IN THE ALLEYS. THE STREETS WERE ROUGH...

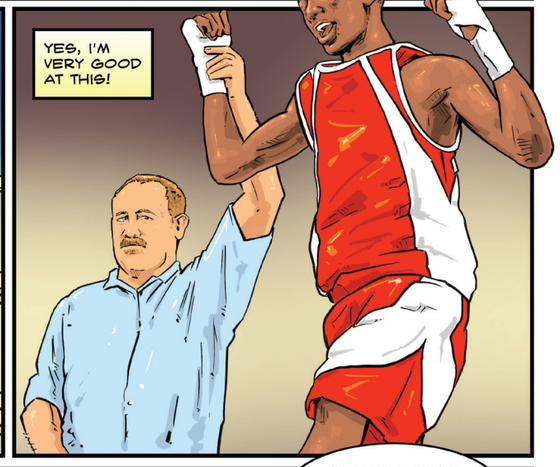
... AND SO WAS HOME!
DAD WAS A SHADOW.
MOM WAS LOVE.
"TOUGH" LOVE.
YOU NEED TO GET TOUGHER!

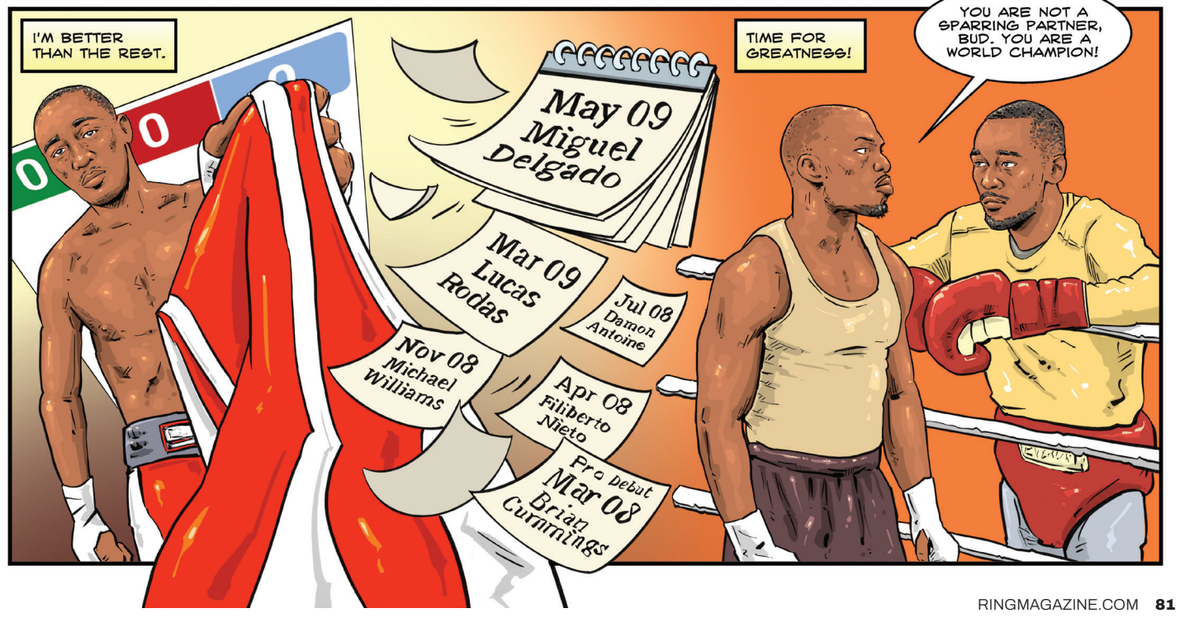

SHE TRIED TO PREPARE ME.
CONTROL THAT RAGE. USE THAT ANGER, TERENCE!


SHE WAS THE FIRST PERSON I EVER WANTED TO FIGHT FOR.
ALL I KNEW WAS FIGHT...


... BUT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO BOX!
I LIKE TO HURT PEOPLE.
MOM IS RIGHT!
THIS ANGER IN ME...
IT'S HERE FOR SOMETHING!
NOW, DOUBLE THE JAB, SON!
... RIGHT HOOK!


I'M GOOD AT THIS!


YES, I'M VERY GOOD AT THIS!


I'M BETTER THAN THE REST.
TIME FOR GREATNESS!
YOU ARE NOT A SPARRING PARTNER, BUD. YOU ARE A WORLD CHAMPION!
May 09 Miguel Delgado
Mar 09 Lucas Rodas
Jul 08 Damon Antoine
Nov 08 Michael Williams
Apr 08 Filiberto Nieto
Pro debut Mar 08 Brian Cummings

TIM WAS RIGHT!

FIRST WORLD TITLE IN 2014

UNIFIED CHAMPION AT 140 POUNDS IN 2016!

UNDISPUTED AT JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT IN 2017!

UNDISPUTED AT WELTERWEIGHT IN 2023!

FOUR-DIVISION WORLD CHAMPION IN 2024!!

WHO'S THE BEST POUND-FOR-POUND, BUD?

DOUBTING ME. AGAIN.

YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER!

HEY, CANELO!...

LET ME SHOW YOU IN SEPTEMBER...!!

SEPTEMBER IS NOW.

TODAY IS THE DAY.

BOXING SAVED ME.

MY FISTS SAVED ME!

I ACCOMPLISHED EVERYTHING IN BOXING.

ALMOST EVERYTHING...!

LET'S GO! LET'S GO!

YOU THINK YOU CAN BREAK ME, CANELO, BUT I'M BUILT DIFFERENT. I DON'T BREAK.

MY FAMILY IS WATCHING. OMAHA'S WATCHING. EVERYTHING I AM, EVERYTHING I FIGHT FOR IS IN THAT RING TONIGHT.

MY PAST IS MY FUEL. I WAS BORN FOR THIS.

LET'S GO!

BATTLE PLAN:
CANELO ALVAREZ

VETERAN TRAINER **RUDY HERNANDEZ** BELIEVES SIZE MATTERS IN THE CANELO-CRAWFORD MATCHUP, BUT ONLY IF ALVAREZ GOES ON THE ATTACK

By Steve Kim

The showdown between Canelo Alvarez and Terence Crawford has created a great debate in the boxing world: Is this a true "superfight" or a cash grab dressed up as one?

The cynics view this as a physical mismatch despite Crawford's impressive resume. Alvarez is the undisputed super middleweight champion and he's been the top dog in the 168-pound division for years. Crawford proved to be the best welterweight of this era, but he's never fought at middleweight or super

Canelo dropped and easily outpointed Edgar Berlanga, but his knockout drought is a concern for some.

middleweight, and his one bout above 147 pounds was not the statement his fans had hoped for.

Last August, he won the WBA 154-pound title with a close unanimous decision over Israil Madrimov at BMO Stadium in Los Angeles. It was far from a dominant outing for "Bud." For the first time since 2016 (spanning 11 bouts), he failed to score a stoppage.

However, those who view Canelo-Crawford as a legitimate matchup point to the very clear signs that Alvarez is slowing down.

The Mexican superstar is three years younger than Crawford, but he has 67 bouts on his ledger and hasn't scored a knockout since 2021 (when he stopped Caleb Plant). He's had seven consecutive bouts go the distance. If he can't stop run-of-the-mill tough guys like Jaime Munguia and Edgar Berlanga, or cut the ring off against a skittish dancer like William Scull, how's he going to clip Crawford?

The pride of Omaha, Nebraska, isn't just a master boxer who's won major belts in four divisions (which isn't the feat it once was in this watered-down era of multiple belts and junior weight classes); he's a versatile punisher who achieved undisputed champ status at junior welterweight and welterweight by his 40th bout.

World-class trainer Rudy Hernandez sees both sides of the debate. He's a Crawford fan and a big believer in the switch-hitter's ability, but at the same time he's leaning in favor of Alvarez. A former fighter himself, Hernandez is the brother and trainer of former two-time junior lightweight titleholder Genaro Hernandez. Now he corners unified Ring bantamweight champion Junto Nakatani and WBO flyweight beltholder Anthony Olascuaga. There is nobody as blunt and as honest in answering questions about the sport of boxing as Hernandez.

Rudy Hernandez is one of the finest coaches in the sport.

The Ring reached out to the Los Angeles native to get his thoughts on this bout and the particular advantages and disadvantages that Canelo has coming into it. How will these factors come into play when Crawford and Canelo meet inside Allegiant Stadium, and how would he prepare the Guadalajara idol to win the fight?

CRAWFORD'S STRENGTHS

When you think of Crawford, the first thing that comes to mind is how versatile he is inside the ring. You could make an argument that he is the greatest switch-hitter in boxing history. Yes, other boxers have changed stances during a fight, but nobody has done it as often or as effectively as he has.

And while "downloading data" long ago became a tired phrase in boxing, it rings true for Crawford, who more than once has given up early rounds and then made the necessary adjustments to pick apart and break down opponents late in fights.

"Crawford has a real ability to read a fighter," said Hernandez, who lauds the veteran's overall boxing IQ. "He has that ability, and I think that's what makes him such a great fighter."

In the past, athletic boxers including Yuriorkis Gamboa, Kell Brook and Shawn Porter have jumped out to early leads but weren't able to sustain their advantages – and all three ended up as KO victims. Egidijus "Mean Machine" Kavaliauskas may have actually scored a knockdown in his bout against Crawford in 2019 (it was ruled a slip), but he was eventually overwhelmed in nine rounds.

Crawford did all this from both stances.

"He's a right-hander who likes to turn southpaw, so whatever it is that he does, I'm going to have something ready for it. Whatever he decides to do, I'll be ready," said Hernandez. "Alvarez is bigger, stronger."

When asked if this variable makes Crawford even more difficult to prepare for, Hernandez stated, "You know what you're going to get, because that's him. That's the way he fights. If you're not ready for that guy that switches, you didn't do your job. But I believe Canelo will have the timing [to catch Crawford between stances]."

CRAWFORD'S WEAKNESSES

The old saying "There are weight classes for a reason" will be repeated often – mainly by the Crawford doubters – during the buildup to this fight. Both will be weighing in as super middleweights, but the reality is that Alvarez is the naturally bigger boxer. Keep this in mind: While Alvarez made his pro debut in 2005 at 139 pounds, he was just 15 years old. He would soon settle in as a welterweight and won his first major world title against Matthew Hatton as a junior middleweight (albeit at a catchweight of 150 pounds, which Canelo missed by a pound and a half).

Canelo gave Jaime Munguia his first taste of ring canvas.

Meanwhile, Crawford began punching for pay in 2008 at the age of 20. In his first outing, he weighed in at 137 pounds. When he won his first major title, it came against Ricky Burns for the WBO lightweight belt.

Both Alvarez and Crawford have won titles in multiple weight classes, but it's Alvarez who has gone as high as light heavyweight. He was able to overcome Sergey Kovalev in the late rounds in 2019 but was thoroughly outboxed by Dmitry Bivol a few years later. The highest Crawford has gone is junior middleweight – once.

"Canelo will have a big advantage in strength, also in punching power," opined Hernandez.

As slick as Crawford can be, he has been touched and hurt. The abovementioned Gamboa and Kavaliauskas were smaller fighters.

At this juncture of their careers, Alvarez is now a full-fledged super middleweight. He has fought at 168 pounds (or above) since 2019, spanning his last 12 outings. So will size matter?

"On this one? Yes," said Hernandez, who understands that as fighters move up in weight, their skills don't suddenly erode, but their power does diminish. "There was this guy named James Toney who was a 168-pounder who went on to fight as a heavyweight. He put hands on big heavyweights, but he couldn't drop them the way he could at super middleweight."

HOW TO PREPARE CANELO FOR CRAWFORD

As the fighters prepare for this battle, Hernandez believes that Alvarez shouldn't just focus on being bigger or stronger than Crawford, but on actually honing his own skills. Throughout the years, there has been an evolution in Alvarez's style. He was once a basic come-forward boxer, but over time he became a slick counterpuncher who would make opponents miss.

With age has come a decline in overall work rate. This current version of Alvarez is more economical in his output. But Hernandez thinks that the focus should not be on power.

"I'd prepare him more for speed than strength," he stated. "Again, we're living in an era when people love that strength-and-conditioning. I would not put any muscle on him at all. [I'd] get the speed going."

Hernandez does not want a slow and lumbering fighter chasing around the more athletic Crawford, who figures to box and move a bit. With that, the last thing you want is to overtrain a fighter who has 67 bouts under his belt and is now in his mid-30s.

Hernandez points out, "He's not as young as he used to be. Fighters don't understand that when you're between 18 and 22, you work a certain way. [From] 22 to 26, or 30, things start to change. You've got to be smarter and get better."

Former 154-pound champ Jermell Charlo was outgunned by Canelo.

In recent fights, Alvarez has fought at a relatively measured pace. Perhaps he was content to fight in this manner because he didn't want to chase opponents who were aiming to go the distance. It was more than that against the constantly moving Scull, however. In that fight, Canelo clearly looked a step slower. Perhaps Alvarez was just bored (like the rest of us). Or was it a sign of a declining fighter?

While many say that Alvarez should focus on cutting off the ring, Hernandez disagrees. "No, because Crawford's not going to be running, and he's not going to be as fast as he was in his 20s when he was a lightweight. That speed is gone."

Logic says that Crawford will have to box intelligently to win. But, according to Hernandez, if you really examine Crawford, he isn't a guy that constantly circles the ring. He is more likely to edge forward and control the center. He has become very comfortable inside the pocket.

"Crawford's not a runner," insists Hernandez. "But he's a slick boxer. He has good timing. He has good everything, but the thing is, once you get hit in a fight with 10-ounce gloves, it's a big difference in a fight without headgear against a guy with the intention of knocking your head off."

LOYALTY

Team Canelo has stuck together through thick and thin.

The boxing business for the most part isn't one based on loyalty. That's an uncomfortable truth. Most relationships simply aren't built to last in this racket. But the union between Canelo Alvarez and **Eddy Reynoso** has stood the test of time.

The fighter-trainer dynamic can be a volatile one. They usually start off with a young and compliant boxer who will listen willingly to everything that a trainer has to say. Over time, they develop a rapport, and soon they are off on a journey. If the boxer has enough talent, they will go into the pro ranks and there is money to be made.

If the boxer has enough success, the compensation can become very significant. Over time, that 10% that the trainer receives can become problematic. Trainers become expendable if they start making too much for the boxer's liking. Many times, trainers are jettisoned, replaced by one that will work for a flat fee or just flat-out cheaper than their predecessor.

Alvarez and Reynoso long ago reached that stage where they were making millions. But it seems that this is the rare partnership that has become strengthened instead of fractured as they made history together. Nobody really knows how much Reynoso gets, but it seems as though money has never been an issue with these two. From the time that Alvarez turned professional in 2005 until now, these two have been joined at the hip through thick and thin.

It looks like they will start and end together. That in itself is remarkable.

TACTICS FOR THE FIGHT

The more active the bout is, the more it favors Alvarez. The last thing he wants is a slow-paced chess match. Yeah, he's a cerebral and technically sound boxer in his own right, but there is no need to overthink this, according to Hernandez.

"I would tell him to take it to [Crawford], make it a fight, and fight him from Round 1 to the end. Fight him!" Hernandez said. "I want Canelo to put his weight on him, stay on him, force him to fight. Make a fight out of it. Remember, [Crawford is] the smaller guy coming up to your division."

When Alvarez scored knockdowns against Jermell Charlo and Berlanga, those two chose to go into survival mode rather than fight their way back. Some argue that Alvarez could've done more to press the attack, but it's difficult to make fights against opponents who are so reluctant. They made, as Teddy Atlas famously described it, the "silent agreement" to see the final bell. The hope is that should Crawford get nailed, he will react differently.

"Is [Crawford] going to be aggressive, or is he going to be humbled?" asked Hernandez. "That could be the difference. He's never been in a fight where he's been hit and humbled. Hector Camacho got hit against Edwin Rosario and he chose not to get hit again and became more of a boxer than a fighter."

Should Crawford decide to stand and fight, this is what Alvarez wants. If there is a constant exchange of punches, chances are that with the superior hand speed and quickness, Crawford will touch up Alvarez in spots. But on the flip side, it is Alvarez who has the heavier hands. Hernandez doesn't think that he should be too selective in his shots.

"[Canelo] just needs to hit him," he said. "I need [Canelo] to hit him from the belt up, take his space away and impose [his] will. Have your body on him and break him." RING

Who's Picking Canelo Alvarez?

Predictions compiled by Anson Wainwright

MIGUEL COTTO

Former four-weight world champion/ Hall of Famer

"Canelo is a very intelligent fighter. He's grown a lot over the years, not just in skill but in how he controls the pace and distance of a fight. I fought him in 2015 at middleweight, and I can tell you firsthand – his strength is real. But what makes him dangerous is his patience and timing. When I moved up to middleweight, I had to rely more on my speed and movement. The punches from the bigger guys – especially someone like Canelo – carry more weight. You can box, you can move, but you still feel it. Your body feels different at that weight, and the power exchanges are not the same as at 140, 147 or 154. That's something every fighter has to adjust to, mentally and physically. Size will matter."

MATTHEW MACKLIN

Former three-time world title challenger/fight analyst

"I think he'll just be too big and that it will be a bridge too far for Crawford. I do think Canelo is on the slide, but Crawford ain't no spring chicken either. He beat [Israil] Madrimov because he's a better, more skillful boxer, but the physicality of Madrimov caused him problems. Canelo on points."

JOE CALZAGHE

Former two-weight world champion/ Hall of Famer

"I just think stepping up to super middleweight is too much of an ask. You have to say Canelo [will win]. I think he's a big favorite going into the fight. Canelo isn't a big super middleweight; he's not tall, so height and reach will be level. That will work in Crawford's favor. I just wonder how he'll respond when he gets hit by someone at that weight and whether his speed will have the impact when he's gained weight. Some fighters, when they step up, get heavier and tire quicker. It's win-win. He'll go in undefeated, and if he loses, he's never been a super middleweight and he's making a fortune. If he wins, that'll put him with some of the greats. I think when it comes to the middle and late rounds, that's when the weight and natural strength will come into it. I'd expect Canelo to win on points, possibly late stoppage."

BOB SANTOS

World-class trainer

"I think it's gonna be a great fight while it lasts, but if Crawford tries to engage with Canelo, I think it's gonna be big trouble, like [Oscar] De La Hoya versus [Bernard] Hopkins. This is Crawford's first fight at 168 and I think the size difference is gonna be a little bit too much. And with the little gloves, he's definitely gonna feel the difference in punching power."

CALLUM SMITH

The Ring's No. 3-rated light heavyweight/former super middleweight champion

"[Crawford is] the most skillful fighter Canelo has been in with for a while. He will cause a lot of problems early on with speed and movement. I just think Canelo's natural size will play a factor over the distance."

SHANE MOSLEY

Former three-weight world champion/ Hall of Famer

"I think it could be a fight where we see how good Terence Crawford really is. Crawford is a great fighter at 135, 140 and 147. We don't know about '54, because he [has only fought one guy] at '54. Making a leap to 168 to fight Canelo and beat him would be historical. With all that being said, I think Canelo is too big. If they fought at 154, it could have gone either way. Now you add extra weight to Canelo and Crawford, which is going to slow Crawford down. From experience, I know that being heavy is not the best way to go. You don't punch harder either. You get hit more, and if you get hit more by Canelo, that could be good night. I think Canelo wins, possibly by knockout in the sixth or seventh round."

SERGIO MORA

Former WBC junior middleweight titleholder/fight analyst

"Crawford will be the quicker, taller, longer fighter, while Canelo will be the bigger, stronger, more experienced fighter. I favor the latter. Like the old adage goes: A great big man will beat a great small man. I do see Canelo getting beat to the punch and outboxed in spots, but not enough to sway enough rounds [for Crawford] to win a decision. It'll be close; Canelo will not leave unscathed. Canelo by decision."

OSLEYS IGLESIAS

The Ring's No. 3-rated super middleweight

"I think Canelo will win because he's already had a lot of fights at 168 pounds. They both have a lot of experience in the ring and are both very good boxers. But nothing is set in stone; they're two men trying to be the best boxer, and the one with the best preparation and tactics will win. I'm going with Canelo."

MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA

Former three-weight world champion/Hall of Famer

"I think it's going to be a good fight as long as Crawford's cardio isn't affected by the weight. It's three divisions up, plus whatever Canelo can gain in 24 hours. That is Crawford's biggest challenge. I think Crawford is a great fighter, but I think Canelo can win by knockout. However, Crawford's skill and ring I.Q. can make the fight go the distance."

RICKY HATTON

Former two-weight world champion/Hall of Famer

"Under normal circumstances, I would say Canelo is far too big, and he's very skillful in his own right. But he has had a lot of fights, and there must be a time when wear and tear takes its toll on him. Crawford might be able to make him miss, but I'm still going with Canelo. His size, his boxing ability, his talent – and he only needs one shot. It might be the one shot that does [Crawford in]. Let's have it right: [Canelo's] knocked out people at light heavyweight. I'm going to go with Canelo by knockout."

"I think it's gonna be a great fight while it lasts, but if Crawford tries to engage with Canelo, I think it's gonna be big trouble ..."
- Bob Santos

JOEL DIAZ

Former world title challenger/ world-class trainer

"As a coach and a former fighter, I know common sense: Canelo is too big for Crawford. Crawford is a great fighter and I've been a big fan. To me, he's the best fighter of this era. But he's a 154-pounder who just moved up from 147. He's moving up to 168 to fight a solid 168-pound fighter. There's no way. We faced Crawford with Israil Madrimov, and I thought we won the fight. Madrimov is a 154-pounder and he gave Terence Crawford the fight of his life. It's only going to be a competitive fight for the first five or six rounds. Terence Crawford is a great fighter and a great technician. He's going to move around, use his skill, but once Canelo starts feeling that Crawford can't hurt him, he's going to get in there and start breaking him down. I think Canelo will win by decision."

CHRISTIAN MBILLI

The Ring's No. 1-rated super middleweight

"It's a very interesting fight. For me, my favorite is Canelo. I think maybe Crawford will win the first four rounds, because he has good speed and technique. But round by round, Canelo will come on and be better in Rounds 6, 7 and 8, because he's bigger. I think on points, but Canelo can stop him too. We saw in the fight with [Jermell] Charlo – it won't be the same, but I think the power of Canelo will get the win. I hope to fight the winner!"

BATTLE PLAN:
TERENCE CRAWFORD

HOW CAN A GREAT WELTERWEIGHT TOPPLE A GREAT SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT? ESTEEMED TRAINER **STEPHEN "BREADMAN" EDWARDS** KNOWS.

By Adam Abramowitz

There are those who believe that Terence Crawford, who spent five years taking over the welterweight division and has had only one fight at 154 pounds, is too small to handle Canelo Alvarez, the undisputed king at 168 pounds. And then there are those who believe Crawford is just plain good enough to pull it off.

It was not too long ago that a certain 154-pound champ – Jermell Charlo – attempted a similar journey and lost in a noncompetitive fight. But unlike Crawford, Charlo had at least been at junior middleweight throughout his career, while "Bud" won his first title all the way back at lightweight. Junior middleweight is new territory, having only strayed there in his most recent fight against Israil Madrimov, whom Crawford beat by unanimous decision in a competitive bout.

Amir Khan got decked in Crawford's second welterweight title defense.

Canelo has been a wrecking ball at 168 pounds and has beaten fighters of all shapes and sizes at the weight. He has the big-fight experience, the punching power with both hands and will have the crowd on his side on fight night. He's truly formidable in the ring and has already stamped himself as a first-ballot Hall of Famer.

But there are those, especially many insiders in the boxing industry, who believe that Crawford has an exceptionally good chance of beating Canelo. Throughout his career, the Nebraskan has defanged his toughest opponents with a preternatural ability to make adjustments in the ring and deliver knockouts with either hand and from either stance. Crawford's next-level ring I.Q. is only matched by his dogged determination to win. We know Crawford will not be there to lay down or cash himself out. There is a question of whether he'll play it a bit safer than usual, however.

Philadelphia-based boxing trainer Stephen "Breadman" Edwards is a believer in Crawford. In addition to training former unified junior middleweight titleholder Julian Williams and former super middleweight beltholder Caleb Plant, Edwards is known for his acute boxing mind. He's a brilliant fight analyst who has shared his knowledge on the pages of The Ring many times before. And he's been on record picking Crawford in his weekly mailbag column on BoxingScene.com.

In reaching out to Breadman, I wanted him to expound on the factors that led him to side with Crawford for the matchup – specifically, what advantages and disadvantages that Canelo brings into the fight, how Edwards would go about training Crawford to face Canelo, and what would be the ideal tactics for Crawford on fight night.

Stephen Edwards is a world-class trainer and a terrific boxing analyst.

CANELO'S STRENGTHS

Canelo's explosive power shots, especially early in fights, are a major advantage. Although he hasn't recorded any stoppages in his last six bouts, he has knocked down many of his opponents, from John Ryder to Jaime Munguia to Edgar Berlanga. He has heavy hands, and his left hook to the body is one of the best power shots in boxing. Beyond that, he has a full arsenal at his disposal and has used a variety of memorable punches in his stoppage victories: right uppercut (Billy Joe Saunders), overhand right (Sergey Kovalev), left hook to the head (Caleb Plant), etc.

Canelo will also have the advantage of experience at the weight class. He's faced and beaten punchers at 168 pounds and has even beaten a puncher at light heavyweight (Kovalev, back in 2019). Canelo has also sparred with heavyweights throughout his career. He's more than comfortable exchanging heavy fire with opponents.

Edwards praised Canelo's defense in particular, believing it doesn't command the respect that it should in boxing.

"Sometimes when guys are attacking fighters, they don't get the credit for having good defense," said Edwards. "Canelo can catch punches. He can slip punches. He has great anticipation. He has the ability to counterpunch, and he can make you miss really clean. His defense is really, really good.

"It's harder to actually implement your defense when you are coming forward and attacking. Most of the top defensive fighters are in retreat more than they attack. But Canelo is a really good defensive fighter who is also a very good offensive fighter. I think he's elite on both ends."

Breadman also marvels at Canelo's chin. The Mexican idol has faced a significant number of big punchers throughout his career and has never hit the canvas as a professional. In addition, he has rarely displayed signs of being hurt in the ring. His ability to take punches is an advantage, especially when facing a sharpshooter like Crawford.

"He has one of the better chins of the era, if not the best," said Edwards. "Very rarely do we see him get hurt. He's moved through four weight divisions. We don't see him get dropped. He's never been stopped. His chin is a historical chin."

CANELO'S WEAKNESSES

Canelo's lack of recent knockouts may in fact suggest that he's in the midst of a physical decline. He has now gone seven fights without a stoppage (including his loss to the current undisputed light heavyweight champion, Dmitry Bivol), which in contemporary boxing can feel like an eternity. While he is still hurting opponents, he is also letting them off the hook. And it isn't as if he's fighting guys who can't be dropped, hurt or stopped. John Ryder had knockout losses before and after fighting Canelo, but Canelo couldn't finish him. Jaime Munguia (who was responsible for Ryder's post-Canelo TKO loss) was recently stopped by Bruno Surace, who had only four career knockouts before facing Munguia. But Munguia was able to go the distance with Canelo.

Al Bello

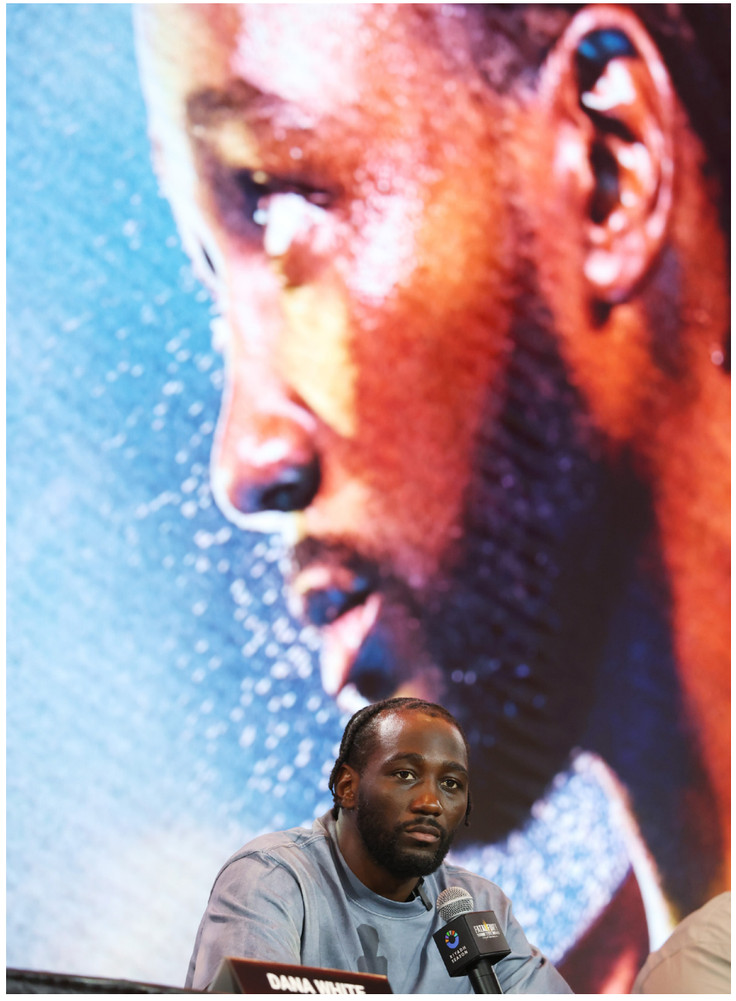
Crawford seized the undisputed championship with a ruthless beatdown of Errol Spence Jr.

Although Canelo is technically the younger fighter in this matchup (35 to Crawford's almost 38), in terms of pro fights he has experienced much more wear and tear. This is amazingly his 20th year as a professional fighter, and his bout against Crawford will be his 68th, whereas Crawford will be making his 42nd ring appearance as a pro.

I'd also argue that Canelo has had far more grueling fights in his career, from the Gennadiy Golovkin series to the Erislandy Lara and Austin Trout fights, he's had many physical and/or mentally taxing nights in the ring. Although Crawford has been known to give up a few early rounds, it was only in his last fight against Madrimov that the result was in doubt when the final scorecards were announced. He just hasn't had the same number of tough fights in his career, which in many respects speaks highly of his talent, but it also reveals that Canelo has generally been in the ring with higher-quality opposition.

Breadman believes that Canelo's biggest weaknesses in this matchup are all related to his physical attributes. He points to Canelo's foot speed as a disadvantage. He believes that Crawford will clearly be the better athlete in the second half of the fight. Breadman also has doubts about Canelo's overall conditioning at this point of his career: There's an inability to get stoppages after dropping fighters, and Canelo seems to need the occasional round off. His comfort level with taking fights to a decision and to not stepping on the gas is also telling. Edwards believes that there's a pattern to Canelo's recent fights that reveals weaknesses.

"If you notice," said Edwards, "with Canelo's recent opponents, Canelo was catching them with something big early and then they get to a point where they



go into survival mode, he'll just let them survive. When something keeps happening over and over again, it's not just a coincidence. It's a trend. It's where he's at in his career right now."

How big to be on fight night will be an important choice for Crawford.

HOW TO PREPARE CRAWFORD

Edwards would advise Crawford should come into the fight at a weight where he feels his best. He doesn't want Crawford to sacrifice any of his athletic advantages by being too heavy in the ring. He believes that what a fighter weighs the night of the fight is even more important than his official weigh-in tally.

In a perfect world, he would want Crawford not to be much higher than 170 pounds the night of the fight, and he would want him to be around 160-162 pounds for the official weigh-in. He thinks that anything higher would be giving up Crawford's inherent advantages.

Edwards' major points of emphasis would be Crawford's defense and awareness of the overall game plan. He wants Crawford to know where the fight could be won and lost. Crawford needs to be hyper-focused on not getting caught by something big in the early rounds. He must also put his ego in check early in the fight and not get into a battle of machismo during the first few rounds; Crawford has to respect what his opponent can do in the ring.

"Crawford will have to be very careful [of] Canelo's explosive outbursts," said Edwards, "because he can knock Crawford out if he hits him clean. Canelo has really brutal one-punch power. And he can really hurt you if he hits you clean, especially early. I would emphasize that Crawford will have to be very aware and be very alert in the first few rounds. He can't be greedy with his offense early, because Canelo, who is a master counterpuncher, is going to be looking for a big shot – not necessarily to knock him out but to put Crawford in his place, into a retreat mode. That could change the whole fight if Canelo is successful with a big shot early."

Offensively, Edwards would prepare Crawford to do something that few Canelo opponents have ever had success with: Go to Canelo's body. In Breadman's eyes, Crawford has the long reach and the variety of shots needed to find the target, which could further deplete Canelo's gas tank and punch volume, making it that much more apparent to the judges as to who is dictating the ring action.

"Crawford is the most underrated body-puncher of this era," said Edwards. "When we talk about great body-punchers of today, we mention Canelo's left hook to the body. We talk about Inoue. But because Crawford doesn't have a signature body punch, he gets overlooked. But he's one of the few guys in this era who can counterpunch to a guy's body. If you look at the Shawn Porter fight, he landed some great body shots in the second half of the fight that helped set up the knockout. He counterpunched to the body against [Julius] Indongo and knocked him out. Crawford's body-punching reminds me of Mike McCallum's, because it's subtle. He goes to the body with both hands. He may not get the credit for it because he doesn't have that one signature shot, but he's brutal to the body."

TACTICS ON FIGHT NIGHT

The fight is a story of two halves for Breadman. He would want Crawford to keep it simple early in the fight; he doesn't want him to open up and risk getting hit with a big shot. He wants Crawford to be stingy, utilize his ring I.Q. and rely on his athleticism.

"I would tell Crawford to not over-punch or overdo it early," said Edwards. "If I'm Crawford, I would move, not over-move, but move. Make Canelo pick up his feet. Try to score points early and not sit down on anything big, because I think that Canelo's best chance to win the fight would be to hit Crawford with a big shot early.

"Just land a jab and break even after the first half of the fight. If it's three rounds apiece going into the second half of the fight, Crawford's in the driver's seat."

The second half of the fight is where Edwards believes that Crawford's advantages will be able to manifest more fully. By the seventh, Crawford will have made his adjustments as to which stance works best and which punches Canelo is vulnerable to. He will also have seen enough of what Canelo is throwing back in return and can adjust accordingly. As the fight progresses, Crawford will have more opportunities to be expansive with his offense. He will have his pick of weapons to deplete, punish and frustrate Canelo.

Edwards emphasizes that Crawford must mix in a body attack in the second half. Those body shots, especially late in the fight, will dissuade Canelo from getting too bold toward the end of the match. Crawford will need to make Canelo hesitant. Jabs, movement, long-range power punches and unexpected body shots will do the trick.

TEAM CRAWFORD

Bill Tompkins

Terence Crawford has an unusual training scenario. He has three longtime trainers who all work together as a team. They have been together for well over a decade and originally coalesced in Omaha, Nebraska. Led by **Brian "BoMac" McIntyre**, Crawford's team also involves **Esau Dieguez** and **Red Spikes**.

In a 2024 interview with Andre Ward for the All the Smoke podcast, McIntyre explained the division of labor between the three trainers. McIntyre is the lead cornerman on fight night. He also prepares the master game plan. Dieguez specifically emphasizes Crawford's inside fighting skills during training camp. Spikes' focus is on Crawford's movement, flow and rhythm in the ring. Although the three have different responsibilities during fight camp, it is a collaborative effort, with all having the confidence and respect of one another to make suggestions and voice disagreements.

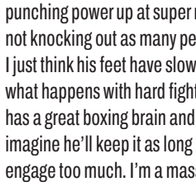
McIntyre, however, stated in the interview that Crawford is the ultimate boss during training camp. McIntyre wasn't using "boss" in a pejorative sense, but he acknowledged that Crawford, at this elevated point of his career, is the one who calls the shots. And it is Crawford just as often as the trainers who makes suggestions or alterations during camp.

BoMac keeps keeps a watchful eye on Bud.

As a group, McIntyre and his team are known for the ability to break down opponents, to find weaknesses and to make tough fights on paper look easy. Among their most notable victories were Crawford's dismantling of Errol Spence Jr. and Chris Eubank Jr.'s rematch victory over Liam Smith, where Team McIntyre was able to reverse the knockout from the first encounter (in which McIntyre wasn't the trainer). In the rematch, it was Eubank who was dominant in getting the stoppage win. Other notable fighters for the team include Keyshawn Davis and Troy Isley.

Who's Picking Terence Crawford?

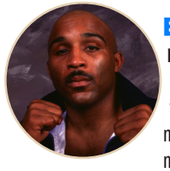
Predictions compiled by Anson Wainwright



CARL FRAMPTON

Former two-weight world champion/fight analyst

"I said when Crawford beat Errol Spence on the TNT Sports (U.K.) broadcast that Crawford beats Canelo, and everybody in the world laughed at me. 'Weight divisions in this sport for a reason,' blah, blah. I said it then and believed it, and I believe it even more now. When you look at the size, there's not much size between the both of them. You've got to remember: Canelo came up through the weights as well. He's never been the biggest super middleweight in the world. We've seen his punching power up at super middleweight; he's not knocking out as many people as he used to. I just think his feet have slowed down and this is what happens with hard fights and age. Crawford has a great boxing brain and figures people out. I'd imagine he'll keep it as long as possible and not engage too much. I'm a massive fan of Canelo, but I just think Crawford would have the boxing knowledge and brain to be able to deal with him. I feel like it could be a dull affair, but I think Canelo loses to Crawford on points."



BUDDY MCGIRT

Former two-weight champion/world-class trainer/Hall of Famer

"I pick Terence because he has the style to beat Canelo. I love Canelo – I think he's the top guy right now. The question is: How deep is that fire burning in him? There's no way in hell [Edgar] Berlanga should have went the distance with him. I ask myself, 'How deep is that fire? Will this fight bring that fire out in him?' I don't know. Will Crawford come in too heavy? I don't know. Big is not always better, if you can fight. Terence can fight. He should not be coming in at 168; he should come in at 162. He comes in at 168, then by fight night, he should be 180. Can he carry that weight effectively for 12 rounds? Crawford on points, if he doesn't come in too heavy."

SHAKUR STEVENSON

The Ring's No. 1-rated lightweight/ reigning WBC titleholder

"I think it's going to be easy for Bud. He can fight. I just think stylistically, it's a style Canelo doesn't really like. He don't want to fight a boxer that's a southpaw and knows how to move. I don't think he's prepared for that. Canelo used to be one of my favorite fighters; I think he's a helluva fighter. His defense is very underrated. Styles make fights, and stylistically it's a horrible matchup for him. I think it's going to be a boxing match. Bud's going to go in there and outbox him. I think he's going to win a decision; I kind of see it being wide."

O'SHAQUIE FOSTER

The Ring's No. 1-rated junior lightweight/reigning WBC titleholder

"I think Crawford gonna dominate. To me, he's the superior fighter. His versatility is crazy and his mindset is different. Canelo don't like movers, and [Crawford is] one of the best at it. Crawford on points."

BRIAN NORMAN

The Ring's No. 1-rated welterweight/reigning WBO titleholder

"I have to ride with Bud. Back against the wall, he has every reason to lose, [but] I think he can do it. His attitude is just different. We all seen this time and time again. His work ethic is like no other. That's why I study him a lot. Some people get complacent; he's not one of them. I think he will box to a decision victory."

ISRAIL MADRIMOV

The Ring's No. 3-rated junior middleweight/former WBA 154-pound titleholder

"Canelo has the size advantage, but Crawford has the skills advantage, in my opinion. [Crawford] is a very smart and skilled boxer. I don't think [the weight will be a factor]. Crawford, I believe, on points."

PAULIE MALIGNAGGI

Former two-weight titleholder/fight analyst

"When the fight was first announced, I was headed to [the] 'a good big man beats a great little man' analogy. But as I see Canelo more and more, he's less and less of what he used to be, and I don't think his choice of opposition in these last couple of years has helped him either. Once I saw the [William] Scull fight, I started changing my mind, because Canelo looked that bad. Despite the size deficiency, Crawford is still the more focused fighter and looks the hungrier fighter. [Crawford] was the more skilled fighter to begin with, but I think he may be able to overcome the naturally bigger size of Canelo. One thing I go back and forth on is how Crawford was unable to keep Madrimov off him and fought that fight on the perimeter of the ring, moving left and right. When Canelo gets in the stalk mode, he's something that won't be stopped. The question is: Can he get in that stalk mode like in the Golovkin rematch against the smaller Crawford? My decision, based on the Scull fight: I don't think he can go there anymore. I'm thinking Crawford may be able to win this fight. He's beyond getting caught with one shot; his defense is very slick. He's also a guy that fights out of both stances, changes and keeps you thinking. I'm picking Crawford on points."

> "I love Canelo – I think he's the top guy right now. The question is: How deep is that fire burning in him?" - Buddy McGirt

RAUL MARQUEZ

Former world champion/ fight analyst

"At age 37, I think it's Crawford's best business decision. He has nothing to lose and will cash in. Has the opportunity to beat the face of boxing and make history. The weight differential won't matter; both are more or less the same height and debuted at the same weight class. Skills pay the bills. Crawford will be two or three steps ahead of Canelo. I don't see a stoppage, but Crawford will tattoo Canelo's face for 12 rounds with fast, accurate combos coming from different angles and make history to win a close unanimous decision."

RONNIE SHIELDS

World-class trainer

"I had Erislandy Lara and Kermit Cintron fight Canelo. I really think Crawford has a good shot to win because of his style. He can go southpaw and orthodox; I think that's gonna give Canelo a lot of problems. Canelo is very smart; he's trying to lure you into traps. In his last fight, he didn't get a chance to do that, because Scull didn't want to fight and ran all over the place. Canelo didn't cut the ring; it was like he wasn't interested in the fight. Whatever was there, he took. I think Crawford will stay more in the middle of the ring. If he does get on the ropes, he won't be there long. He'll hit, get out of the way, and come right back. You can counter Canelo a lot, because he'll throw hard shots at you, and if he misses, he's right there to be hit. I think that's where Crawford is going to take advantage. Make him miss, make him pay, then get out of the way and come right back and do the same thing. I think Crawford will win a close unanimous decision."

© Wojtek Urbanek

THE FACE OF BOXING

Canelo vs. Crawford
The Trainers

Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

When Canelo Alvarez meets Terence Crawford in the ring on September 13, he'll bear the imprint of the men who taught him.

The story of 13-year-old Saul Alvarez walking into a gym in Guadalajara and falling under the spell of Jose "Chepo" Reynoso is boxing lore. Chepo nicknamed his young charge "Canelo" and taught him the rudiments of boxing. After the young man turned pro, Chepo trained and managed him.

A lot of trainers can take a good fighter and make him better. Very few trainers can build an elite fighter from scratch. The best trainers have the ability to recognize and develop talent. They're teachers with a knowledge of boxing, the ability to communicate and an understanding of human nature. And they care about their fighters.

"We are not famous or anything," Chepo said long ago. "But we know how to work. Fights are won in the gym. In the ring, they just raise your hand."

In recent years, Chepo's son, Eddy, has taken on the primary training role for Canelo. But Chepo is still the patriarch of Team Alvarez. Before each fight, wherever he is, he gathers those around him for a short prayer: "God, please, let no one be badly hurt. If we win, we win. It is in your hands."

Speaking of Chepo and Eddy, Canelo says, "It is beautiful to have a family like this. I am who I am because of them."

It's often said that the fighter makes the trainer, not the other way around. But no matter how much natural ability Terence Crawford had, someone had to teach him to box.

When Crawford was 7 years old, his father brought him to the C.W. Boxing Club in Omaha, where a local fighter named Brian McIntyre was training.

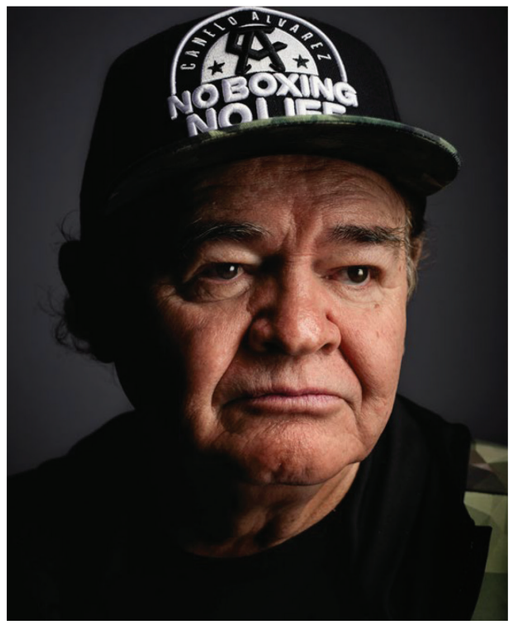
"BoMac" had 21 fights as a pro and lost 14 of them. Early in his career, he fought at 206 pounds. By the end, it was 307. He was knocked out nine times.

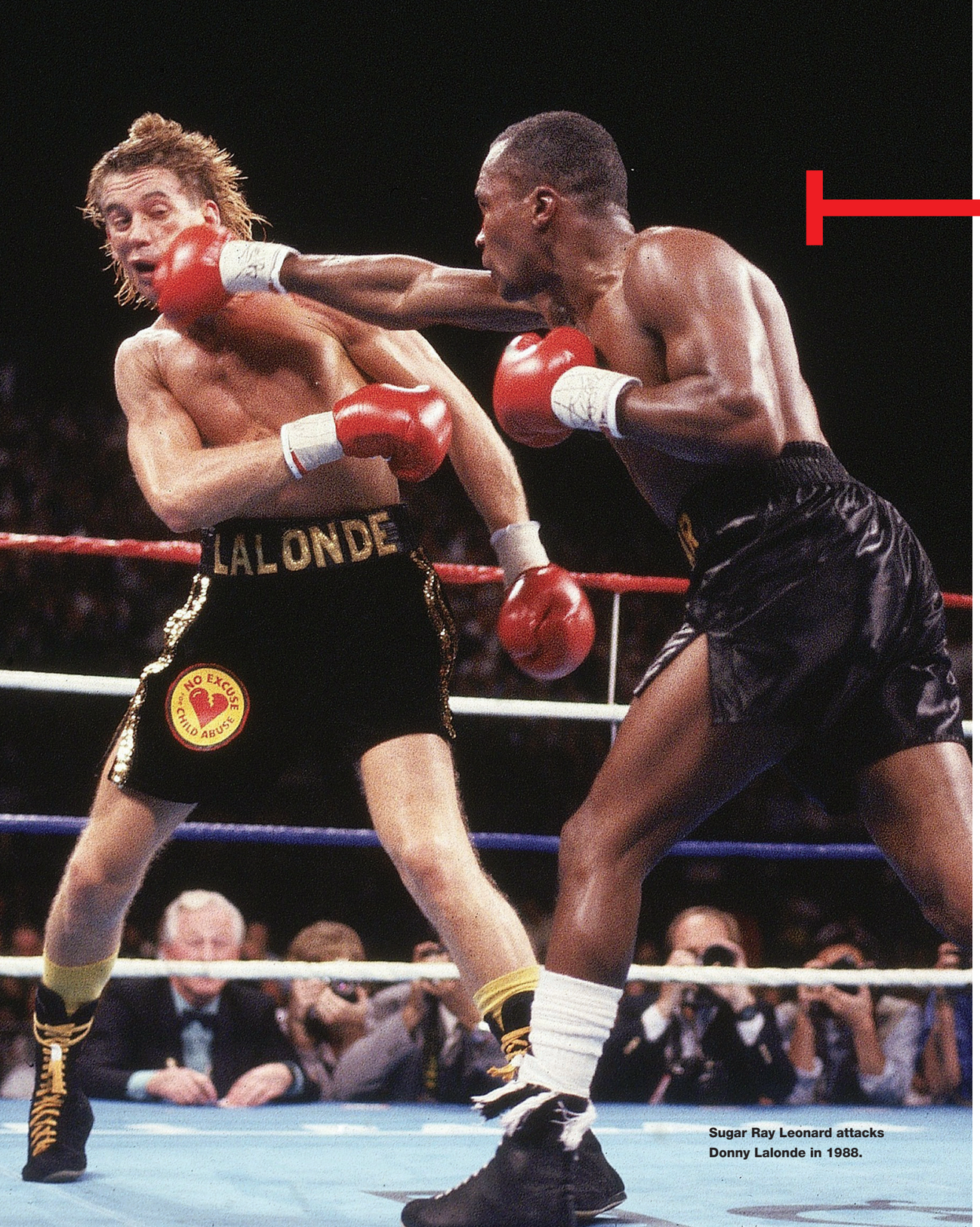
McIntyre was trained by Midge Minor and, from time to time, assisted his mentor in the gym, working with boys who were learning to box. Occasionally, he helped out with Crawford. By the time Minor died in 2018, BoMac was Terence's lead trainer with help from Esau Dieguez.

"Crawford could work his own corner on fight night," Hall of Fame matchmaker Bruce Trampler says. "That's not a knock on BoMac. That's a tribute to Bud."

But McIntyre motivates. He knows which buttons to push. And consider the role he'll play on September 13 when, having readied his charge for combat, he'll insert Crawford's mouthpiece, pat Bud on the back and speak the last words that Bud hears before the bell for Round 1 rings.

Meanwhile, Crawford says of BoMac: "He's my man. He's always got my back. We're cool together." RING





Sugar Ray Leonard attacks Donny Lalonde in 1988.

THE SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT DIVISION HAS HAD A CLEAR LEADER FOR SOME TIME, BUT THE YEARS BEFORE **CANELO** WERE A WILD RIDE **by Don Stradley**

168 B.C.

Canelo Alvarez has been such a dominant figure at super middleweight that it might be time for a refresher course on the division's history. After all, the 168-pound class has featured many fine fighters in the decades before Canelo. The division has had its share of big fights, big names, tragedies and comedies. Hall of Famers have dropped by and then moved on, while a handful of greats have dominated the division and made their names there. For a group not established until Ronald Reagan's first term as U.S. president, the activity has been considerable. But like all new weight classes, it took time for the super middleweights to catch on. Boxing fans have traditionally greeted new divisions with a level of enthusiasm that would make New Coke or Google Glass look popular.

The saga began in 1983 when the International Boxing Federation emerged in New Jersey. Along with the offer of

Andre Ward (left) seized the 168-pound throne with a points win over Carl Froch.

15-round fights, the IBF established a new weight class right between middleweight and light heavyweight. The idea for such a class had been broached before (and had even been tested on a small scale by some state commissions with the inaugural "junior light heavyweight" belt won by Don Fullmer in Utah in 1967), but the IBF made it official. On Wednesday, March 28, 1984, Atlantic City fans jeered as Murray Sutherland won a drab decision over Ernie Singletary to claim this new division's title. Neither Sutherland nor the weight class nor the upstart IBF generated gobs of interest. Though certain middleweights who enjoyed snacking between meals had high hopes for the new class, many sportswriters were dubious. Already worn out by the World Boxing Council and the World Boxing Association, press row dreaded one more organization, and one more fighter calling himself a "champion." As for Sutherland, he'd not been informed that a title was at stake until a few weeks before the bout. He'd never heard of the IBF.

A native of Scotland who had relocated to Michigan, Sutherland was a 40-11-1 fringe contender who'd already lost a pair of title bids at light heavyweight. Still, even if this belt had no history behind it, Sutherland certainly talked like a proud new titlist. "The next time I fight, you'll see a more aggressive fighter," he said, "because I'll have the confidence that goes with being a champion."

It sounded good, but Sutherland lost the belt in his first defense four months later. The new titleholder, Chong Pal-Park, fought almost exclusively in South Korea for the next three-plus years, defending the obscure crown seven times. When the better-known WBA launched its own super middleweight category, Park ditched the IBF belt and won the WBA title by beating Jesus Gallardo. Then he lost it to Fulgencio Obelmejias, a former middleweight who had lost twice to Marvelous Marvin Hagler. Obelmejias promptly lost the belt to another South Korean, In-Chul Baek.

Just when it seemed the super middleweight class would remain a junk closet for has-beens and unknowns, another sanctioning body sprouted out of Puerto Rico: the lightly regarded and totally unnecessary World Boxing Organization. On November 4, 1988, Thomas Hearns struggled to win a majority decision over James Kinchen to claim that new party's belt at 168. Three days later, the WBC joined the fun and crowned its own super middleweight titlist, Sugar Ray Leonard, who knocked out Donny Lalonde, a light heavyweight titleholder. The super middleweight class had existed for only a short time, but titlists were popping up like mushrooms.

The Leonard-Lalonde bout felt like a contrived promotion, seemingly engineered to benefit Leonard. Lalonde's name meant virtually nothing to the mainstream public, so it was decided that the contest would be for both Lalonde's WBC light heavyweight belt and the newly minted WBC super middleweight belt. This arrangement gave Leonard a chance to win two titles in one fight. It would also make him a five-division title winner, a trick just turned by Hearns, thanks to the newly born WBO and the new weight class. (In 1988, the WBO meant so little that most considered Leonard the first five-division titlist, but the gradual acceptance of the WBO has since tipped the credit back Hearns' way.) Moreover, Lalonde agreed to come in at 168, much below his usual weight.

The bout was ridiculous on many levels. For one thing, neither fighter would weigh 175, yet a light heavyweight belt would be contested. It had also long been mandated in boxing that a fighter couldn't own titles in two classes at once, a detail disregarded during the fight's buildup. When confronted by critics of the bout, Leonard would smile condescendingly and say the fight was an "event," as if he were beyond reproach. Shortly after his victory, the WBC announced that, indeed, fighters couldn't hold belts from two weight classes at once. As he'd probably intended from the start, Leonard relinquished both belts.

When Leonard's camp floated the idea of a rematch with old rival Hearns, the WBC returned the super middleweight belt to him. This was more marketable than saying Leonard was fighting for Hearns' WBO belt and would earn the WBC some tasty sanctioning fees. Sportswriters debated the legitimacy of both fighters' claims to be titlists at 168 (their bout was fought at a catchweight of 164; Leonard weighed 160), while fans were baffled by the increasing paperwork involved in making these fights happen.

After a controversial draw with Hearns and a dull win over Roberto Duran, Leonard relinquished the WBC belt again. Italy's Mauro Galvano and Argentina's Dario Matteoni fought in Monaco to name his successor. Galvano won on points.

By now, it was apparent that not even Leonard could prop up the fledgling weight class, and with most of the contenders being unknowns from far away, he couldn't make money with them. Perhaps feeling the same way, Hearns dumped his WBO belt to focus on the light heavyweight class. Yet there were glimmers of hope for the super middleweights as the 1990s unfurled.

Two of England's top middleweights, hard-hitting Nigel Benn and flashy Chris Eubank, gave the 168-pound group some much-needed panache. After winning the WBC title from Galvano, Benn made nine successful defenses, including an epic draw with Eubank and his unfortunate 1995 bout with Gerald McClellan. That brutal encounter ended with McClellan suffering permanent injuries. Benn eventually lost the title to Sugar Boy Malinga in 1996.

The flamboyant Eubank also owned a super middleweight belt – the still-disparaged WBO version. His winning the vacant title in 1991 was draped in

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT LANDMARKS

Caesars Palace, Las Vegas, June 12, 1989
Sugar Ray Leonard D 12 Thomas Hearns

Eight years had passed since their first bout, and word on "The Hitman" was that he was shot. But once the fight started, Hearns fought like a new man. He dropped Leonard twice during the bout and bravely withstood Leonard's final-round rally. The draw verdict inspired boos from the crowd of 15,336 and debates along press row. Even Leonard, in his 2011 memoir, referred to the bout as "a loss to Tommy Hearns, no matter what the judges said." The 168-pound class, however, had enjoyed its first major event, an inadvertent christening from two aging superstars.

Old Trafford, Greater Manchester, Oct. 9, 1993
Nigel Benn D 12 Chris Eubank

More than 42,000 turned out to see Benn-Eubank II. With Benn putting his WBC belt on the line against Eubank's WBO title, along with their intense personal rivalry – Eubank had KO'd Benn in a previous bout – the contest was bound to draw attention. And it did, not just among British fans but worldwide. The atmosphere was charged, the fighting was intense, and the final round was a scorcher that brought the audience to its feet. Judges scored the bout a draw. It was said that Benn-Eubank II generated more interest than the Lennox Lewis-Frank Bruno world title bout eight days earlier. That meant if the right names were on the marquee, the super middleweights could steal the spotlight from the heavyweights, an idea that would've been laughable a decade earlier.

MGM Grand, Las Vegas, Nov. 18, 1994
Roy Jones Jr. UD 12 James Toney

Toney was such a reliable ring technician that oddsmakers made him a slight favorite over Jones. Enthusiasm for Toney was understandable, for the man known as "Lights Out" was undefeated, had already been a long-reigning middleweight titlist and had held the IBF super middleweight belt for more than a year. Yet Jones played with Toney, convincing people they were seeing the latest "greatest of all time," boxing's version of Michael Jordan. The three scorecards favored Jones with scores as wide as the Grand Canyon.

Millenium Stadium, Cardiff, Wales, Nov. 3, 2007
Joe Calzaghe UD 12 Mikkel Kessler

Calzaghe, the Ring/WBO champion, was a 35-year-old veteran who had dominated the super middleweights for a decade, while Kessler was the undefeated WBA and WBC titleholder. This was a dream bout, with two great super middleweights coming together to unify all but one piece of the championship. Though Kessler was strong in the early rounds, Calzaghe settled down and fought like a master. The scorecards favored the Welshman by 117-111 and 116-112 (twice). "It was the fight of my life," Calzaghe told ESPN 10 years later. The victory would have unified all four belts, had Calzaghe not recently relinquished the IBF title. But in the eyes of 50,000 fight fans in Cardiff, he was undoubtedly the king at 168 pounds.

Wembley Stadium, London, May 31, 2014
Carl Froch KO 8 George Groves

Froch's rematch with Groves deserves a special mention for drawing 80,000 to Wembley, making it Britain's biggest fight attendance since World War II. Other bouts have since surpassed it, but Froch-Groves II remains among the most widely attended bouts in history, which is highly impressive for a super middleweight contest. Froch, the IBF and WBA titlist, had stopped Groves in their first bout, but due to the public outcry about the referee's decision to stop the fight, a rematch was made. In The Ring's 2014 Knockout of the Year (and Event of the Year), Froch stopped Groves at 2:34 of the eighth. There was no controversy this time.

tragedy, however, as opponent Michael Watson came out of the bout with career-ending, near-fatal injuries. Still, even those who dismissed the WBO had to admire Eubank's busy schedule. He successfully defended his super middleweight title 14 times during a three-year span.

Steve Collins ended Eubank's WBO reign and had a respectable run of seven defenses, including two wins over Benn. When Collins retired, Eubank competed for the vacant WBO title against Joe Calzaghe, the "Welsh Dragon." Calzaghe won a spirited 12-rounder, giving the division a new star and a new chapter.

While the U.K. had a good thing going with the Benn-Eubank-Collins-Calzaghe era, American fans had a prime James Toney to watch. After winning the IBF title from Iran Barkley in 1993, Toney made three successful defenses, highlighted by a bruising battle with Prince Charles Williams, won by Toney via 12th-round KO. When Roy Jones Jr. easily defeated Toney, it appeared the division's first true superstar had arrived. He had a strong run as IBF titlist from 1994 to 1996, but the restless Jones moved on to the 175-pound class after making only five defenses at 168.

Possessing none of Jones' wanderlust, Germany's Sven Ottke made a whopping 21 title defenses at super middleweight, and he accomplished it against some solid challengers, including Charles Brewer, from whom he won the IBF belt in 1998 and defeated in a rematch in 2000, plus Thomas Tate (twice), Anthony Mundine, Glen Johnson, Byron Mitchell, Mads Larsen and Robin Reid. He even snagged the WBA belt along the way and retired as an undefeated double beltholder. Unfortunately, Ottke's defensive style made for some dull times. Critics derided him as a protected fighter who never strayed from Germany and relied on hometown scoring.

While Ottke was sequestered in Deutschland, Calzaghe also made 21 title defenses, against many of the same names on Ottke's resume. That Calzaghe and Ottke never fought each other is a sore spot in the division's history, but for many reasons, it never happened. Like Ottke, Calzaghe retired undefeated. Unlike Ottke, his quick-handed style was entertaining. Calzaghe's greatest performance may have been his utter domination of power-punching Jeff Lacy in 2006, a 12-round decision that earned Calzaghe the IBF title and the inaugural Ring 168-pound championship. But when he decided to venture into the light heavyweight class, Calzaghe's absence threatened to leave the super middles in another dark period. Then television stepped in.

> From paper crown to pay-per-view, the story of the super middleweights has been unique.

In 2009, the Showtime network teamed up with several boxing promoters to create the Super Six World Boxing Classic, an unprecedented tournament to crown a unified champion at 168. Two of the best super middleweights in the world would take part – WBA titlist Mikkel Kessler and WBC beltholder Carl Froch – as well as 2004 Olympic gold medalist Andre Ward and former middleweight titleholders Arthur Abraham and Jermain Taylor. In 2011, Ward emerged as the tournament winner, defeating Froch in the final. The unanimous decision victory unified WBA and WBC belts and earned Ward the vacant Ring title as well as the Fighter of the Year award.

The Super Six was a great boost for the weight division, but fans were split by Ward. Some appreciated him. Others found him dull. After a short stint as the light heavyweight champion, Ward retired without a loss.

Another tournament, the World Boxing Super Series, began in 2017. Though the WBSS focused on more than one weight class, the 168-pound division was featured again. This time, Britain's Callum Smith earned the laurels – and the vacant Ring belt – with a seventh-round KO of George Groves in 2018. A well-seasoned fighter who had already won several minor belts as a super middleweight, Smith remained the division's top man until Alvarez defeated him in 2020.

The question at the time was whether Alvarez, already known for hopping weight classes, would stay in the neighborhood or simply seek better paydays elsewhere. Somewhat surprisingly, aside from a failed trip to 175, where he lost to Dmitry Bivol in 2022, Alvarez has made the 168-pound class his base of operations. Since beating Smith, he's 9-0 at 168 and has become the first undisputed super middleweight champion. The only blip came last year when the IBF stripped him for not fighting the group's mandatory contender, William Scull. Scull claimed the vacated belt in a match with Vladimir Shishkin, but in May 2025, Alvarez defeated Scull and regained the title, making Canelo a two-time undisputed champion at 168.

It may have started with Sutherland winning a snoozefest at Harrah's, but the story had to start somewhere. In an interview last year with BoxingScene.com, Sutherland looked back at winning the IBF belt with humor: "None of us knew whether it would be a paper crown or a long-standing, well-respected title." He added, "I wouldn't even realize I'd become a proper world champion until years later." An impressive lineage of super middleweights followed Sutherland, with too many quality fighters to mention in a brief recap.

From paper crown to pay-per-view, the story of the super middleweights has been unique. Alvarez's upcoming bout with Terence Crawford in Las Vegas will be the richest super middleweight fight of all time, and probably the most watched. It's another milestone for a division that started as a big farce but is now big money.

MASTER CLASS

CANELO ALVAREZ HAS FACED THE BEST OF FOUR WEIGHT DIVISIONS, BUT SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT IS WHERE HE REIGNS SUPREME

By Thomas Gerbasi

Criminally underrated, despite being home to a host of boxing greats, the 168-pound division will be getting the worldwide spotlight on September 13, when undisputed super middleweight champion Saul "Canelo" Alvarez takes on the challenge of fellow four-division titleholder Terence Crawford in a Las Vegas superfight.

It's the kind of fight that not only satisfies the purists interested in seeing if Crawford, a former 135-, 140- and 147-pound champion and current junior middleweight titleholder, can jump up two more weight classes to shock the Mexican superstar, but one that will also draw a wider audience tuned in to Netflix on the night of the fight. And while there are pockets of supporters in Crawford's corner, many believe that circumstances are clearly in Alvarez's favor. Most in the latter group point to Alvarez's size as the deciding factor. But the real reason may be that in a storied 67-fight career that has already secured him a place in Canastota's International Boxing Hall of Fame, Alvarez has accomplished the most at 168.

Would the undisputed king agree?

"Yes, I feel this is my best version because I feel strong and I'm feeling my best," Alvarez told The Ring on the day his fight with Crawford was made official. "I don't need to cut so much weight, so yeah, I'm feeling my best at 168."

Before arriving in the division made famous by such iconic boxers as Joe Calzaghe, Roy Jones Jr., Andre Ward and Chris Eubank, just to name a few, Guadalajara's Alvarez began his pro career as a 15-year-old junior welterweight in 2005. He eventually started to make noise on both the local and international scenes as a welterweight, but it was at junior middleweight where he won his first world title by defeating Matthew Hatton in 2011.

Stardom followed for Alvarez as he engaged in bouts with the likes of Shane Mosley and Floyd Mayweather Jr. before claiming the middleweight championship in a catchweight bout with Miguel Cotto and making the full-fledged jump to 160 in his first of three bouts against Gennadiy Golovkin. By now, it was the fall of 2018, and while he had a super middleweight bout with Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. in May of 2017, a decision to make a permanent move north came after his majority decision win over Golovkin in their rematch.

"For me, making 154, I almost felt like I'm going to die,"

Rocky Fielding succumbed to Canelo's attacks in the third round.

Callum Smith lasted the distance against Canelo but was dominated along the way.

said Alvarez. "After I moved up to 160, it was a little bit better, but it was still hard to make 160. And then when I moved up eight pounds to 168, I feel my best – much stronger, much more complete in my body."

The proof is in the results. Excluding the 164-pound catchweight bout with Chavez Jr., Alvarez has made the walk 11 times as a super middleweight, winning each fight, four ending by way of knockout. In addition to his four sanctioning body belts and the Ring title, Alvarez fought opponents that sported an amazing 323-10-2 combined record when they fought him. That's a 96% winning percentage. And, like Crawford ahead of him, six of those opponents (Callum Smith, Billy Joe Saunders, Caleb Plant, Jaime Munguia, Edgar Berlanga and William Scull) were undefeated when they faced Alvarez. I asked him if he likes putting that first mark in an opponent's loss column.

"Yeah, I love it," Alvarez said. "It's history for my books, beating undefeated fighters and great fighters, and I think I did really well."

That may be an understatement. And given Alvarez's difficulties making 154 and 160 pounds after a while, you have to wonder if he ever thought that he should have made that move to 168 sooner.

"No, I think there are times for doing things, and this was the correct moment to do it," he said. "I never think, 'Oh, I should have done this before,' or this or that. I think everything is in the right time."

In addition to becoming boxing's biggest star on pay-per-view, Alvarez has been a staple on the pound-for-pound list, even maintaining the top spot from November 2019 to March 2022, a span of two years and four months. During that time, there were a couple appearances at middleweight and light heavyweight, but he won the Ring Magazine and Boxing Writers Association of America Fighter of the Year awards in 2019 and 2021, proving that while his most lucrative PPV fights against Mayweather and Golovkin came south of 168, he's been in the best form of his career since moving up.

At super middleweight, the key word has been "dominance." Yes, there have been some highlight-reel moments, but for the most part, Alvarez has punished his opponents over the distance and left no doubts about his superiority.

"I think that way – that most of the time I need to dominate them every time I step in the ring, no matter what," he said.

World-class fighters who can take the heat will usually hear the final bell against Alvarez, but those who are a step below that elite level might not last.

That was evident in his proper super middleweight debut against Rocky Fielding at Madison Square Garden 10 days before Christmas in 2018. Critics would say it was an early holiday gift for the Mexican, who dropped the Brit three times before finishing him in the third. But when someone is coming off a pair of fights with Golovkin, practically any opponent would be a letdown.

Alvarez did what you do with fighters that aren't on your level, though, and he immediately felt the difference that eight pounds gave him.

The Caleb Plant triumph was arguably Canelo's best showing at 168.

"I think I gained more power in 168 because I didn't need to cut so much weight, and I felt stronger there," said Alvarez. When asked if he lost anything with the move, he replied: "Maybe my moves a little bit with my feet, but I don't think [I lost] that much. I feel great at 168."

Oddly enough, in 2019, he went back to middleweight to retain his Ring, WBA and WBC titles and win the IBF crown against Daniel Jacobs, then went up to light heavyweight to win a WBO belt with a brutal 11th-round stoppage of Sergey Kovalev.

But, as 2020 dawned, he settled in at super middleweight. A near-shutout of unbeaten Brit Callum Smith was his lone fight of the pandemic-stricken year, but it earned him the Ring/WBA/WBC championship. Then it was back to business as usual in 2021, as he stayed busy with three fights, hitting that mark for the first time in 10 years.

Alvarez got a mandatory defense out of the way in a February 2021 mismatch, blasting out Avni Yildirim in three rounds, but he was frighteningly good in back-to-back stoppages of Billy Joe Saunders (TKO 8) and Caleb Plant (TKO 11), owners of a combined 51-0 record heading into the bouts. Saunders donated the WBO belt to Canelo's collection, and the Plant fight made Alvarez the first undisputed champion in the history of the super middleweight division after he took the Tennessee native's IBF title and showed that while the contenders to the crown were good, he was simply better.

On top of the world, Alvarez was hungry for another move, this time to cruiserweight. Conversely, some would say Canelo got greedy when it was proposed that he could challenge a ripe-for-the-picking cruiserweight titleholder in Ilunga Makabu. That fight didn't materialize, but one did with light heavyweight titleholder Dmitry Bivol in May 2022, and it may have revealed Alvarez's ceiling. A steel-chinned technician who wasn't flustered by Alvarez's forward motion, Bivol controlled the distance, outworked and outboxed him over 12 rounds to win a unanimous decision.

After that stinging defeat, Alvarez's first since he lost to Mayweather in 2013, he returned to 168 pounds and has won six in a row. In the process, he's been winning cleanly and clearly, but has also faced criticism that he's fighting less than ideal opposition and not dispatching them as easily as he did in the past. Witness John Ryder, Edgar Berlanga and William Scull all going the distance with him. But although he hasn't closed the show lately, he has won clearly – the possible exception being Scull. In Canelo's defense, it takes two to make a fight, and what happened during the Scull fight in May of this year is a particular sore spot with Alvarez.

"You know what, I have a lot of really good fights, but I think the most complicated is with this fucker William Scull, who never fought. It's very difficult to fight with somebody who doesn't want to fight."

Scull certainly didn't want to fight, but Alvarez couldn't figure out this puzzling foe, either, with the result being a bout that set a CompuBox record for fewest combined punches thrown in a 12-round fight: 445.

The silver lining was that Alvarez regained the IBF belt he was stripped of for fighting Berlanga. Regardless of this accomplishment, the vultures truly came out after that bout in Riyadh, many of them opining that Alvarez himself is ripe for the picking by Crawford, who can be slick enough to give the champion trouble if he sticks to that game plan and doesn't engage in a firefight.

Then again, that was perceived to be the case when Alvarez battled Jermell Charlo in September 2023. Canelo had settled his business with Golovkin, impressively defeating him via unanimous decision in their third fight, and after that was a homecoming win in Guadalajara over the game but overmatched Ryder. Charlo, 35-1-1 entering the bout at T-Mobile Arena, was expected to force Alvarez to dig into his bag of tricks.

Again, it didn't happen. The fight wasn't close, and Alvarez cruised to a near-shutout win, dropping the reigning 154-pound champ in the process. It was the same story eight months later when he showed Jaime Munguia that there are indeed levels to the game. Unlike some recent Alvarez foes, Munguia showed up to fight and win, but the champion was a step ahead and a level above.

When Alvarez has a test in front of him, he will rise to the occasion. "Fight" like Scull or show too much respect to Alvarez like Berlanga did, and he will get the win, pick up his paycheck and move on.

Terence Crawford is a test, and Alvarez is already amped up about the September showdown. It's why, at the age of 35, with more money than he could ever spend and already in the conversation for greatest Mexican boxer of all time, he still wants to do this. He still wants to add to his legacy against another one of this era's best.

"I love boxing," said Alvarez. "I love what I do, and I always want to go in the ring and put out my best to win, because I'm a competitive person. That's why I still enjoy what I do right now."

Is Alvarez the greatest super middleweight of all time? He's got a case. He's unbeaten in the division and is the only undisputed champion in the history of the weight class. He has defeated legitimate top-level competition along with the usual mandatories, and there's never been a fight at 168 that he's been in serious danger of losing. He also has a few years left in the tank at the elite level as he approaches his mid-30s. Perhaps the only thing missing is that divisional fight that captures the imagination of fans around the globe.

Ward had the Super Six tournament, Calzaghe had Jeff Lacy, Jones had James Toney, Eubank and Nigel Benn had each other, and Steve Collins had Eubank and Benn at the end of their careers.

Is Crawford that fighter for Alvarez? For the "Bud" doubters, Mosley suffered no ill effects moving up from lightweight to welterweight to fight and beat Oscar De La Hoya in 2000. Special fighters do special things. Crawford is a special fighter. But so is Alvarez. RING

THE GREATS AT 168

(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

SAUL "CANELO" ALVAREZ
RECORD: 63-2-2
(39 KOs)
TITLES WON: Ring, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO

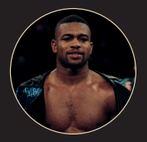
NIGEL BENN
RECORD: 42-5-1
(35 KOs)
TITLES WON: WBC

JOE CALZAGHE*
RECORD: 46-0 (32 KOs)
TITLES WON: Ring, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO (not held simultaneously)

STEVE COLLINS
RECORD: 36-3 (21 KOs)
TITLES WON: WBO

CHRIS EUBANK
RECORD: 45-5-2
(23 KOs)
TITLES WON: WBO

CARL FROCH*
RECORD: 33-2 (24 KOs)
TITLES WON: IBF, WBA, WBC



ROY JONES JR.*
RECORD: 66-10
(47 KOs)
TITLES WON: IBF

MIKKEL KESSLER
RECORD: 46-3 (35 KOs)
TITLES WON: WBA, WBC

SVEN OTTKE
RECORD: 34-0 (6 KOs)
TITLES WON: IBF, WBA

CHONG-PAL PARK
RECORD: 46-5-1
(39 KOs)
TITLES WON: IBF, WBA

JAMES TONEY*
RECORD: 77-10-3
(47 KOs)
TITLES WON: IBF

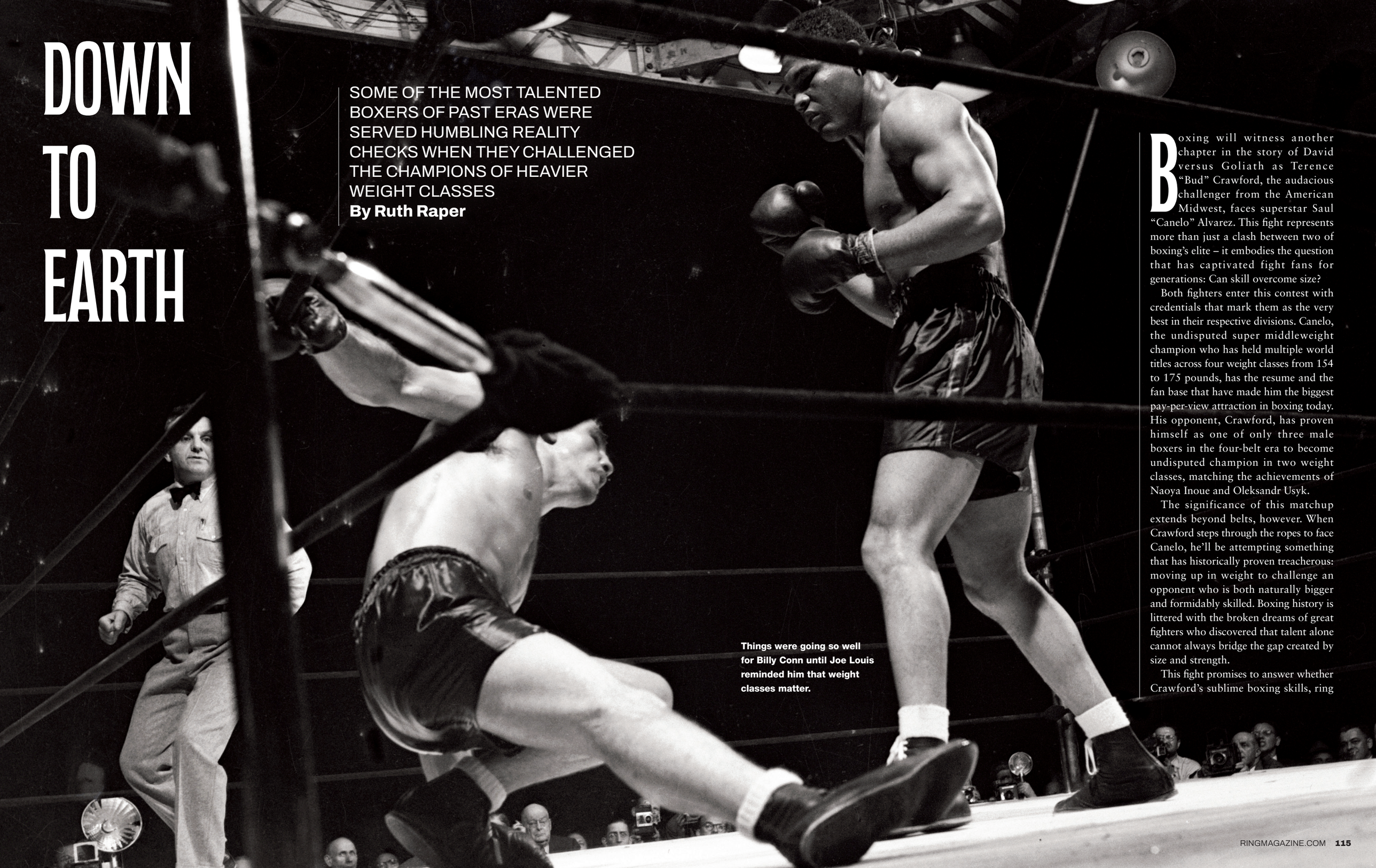
ANDRE WARD*
RECORD: 32-0 (16 KOs)
TITLES WON: Ring, WBA, WBC

*International Boxing Hall of Fame member

DOWN TO EARTH

SOME OF THE MOST TALENTED BOXERS OF PAST ERAS WERE SERVED HUMBLING REALITY CHECKS WHEN THEY CHALLENGED THE CHAMPIONS OF HEAVIER WEIGHT CLASSES

By Ruth Raper



Things were going so well for Billy Conn until Joe Louis reminded him that weight classes matter.

Boxing will witness another chapter in the story of David versus Goliath as Terence "Bud" Crawford, the audacious challenger from the American Midwest, faces superstar Saul "Canelo" Alvarez. This fight represents more than just a clash between two of boxing's elite – it embodies the question that has captivated fight fans for generations: Can skill overcome size?

Both fighters enter this contest with credentials that mark them as the very best in their respective divisions. Canelo, the undisputed super middleweight champion who has held multiple world titles across four weight classes from 154 to 175 pounds, has the resume and the fan base that have made him the biggest pay-per-view attraction in boxing today. His opponent, Crawford, has proven himself as one of only three male boxers in the four-belt era to become undisputed champion in two weight classes, matching the achievements of Naoya Inoue and Oleksandr Usyk.

The significance of this matchup extends beyond belts, however. When Crawford steps through the ropes to face Canelo, he'll be attempting something that has historically proven treacherous: moving up in weight to challenge an opponent who is both naturally bigger and formidably skilled. Boxing history is littered with the broken dreams of great fighters who discovered that talent alone cannot always bridge the gap created by size and strength.

This fight promises to answer whether Crawford's sublime boxing skills, ring

intelligence and championship pedigree can overcome the fundamental laws that have governed boxing since its inception – that a good big man typically beats a good little man, and that some mountains are simply too tall to climb. These stories serve as both inspiration and warning, illustrating the thin line between legendary achievement and devastating overreach.

Joe Louis vs. Billy Conn

June 18, 1941, Polo Grounds, New York City

Perhaps no story better encapsulates this phenomenon than the tale of Billy Conn, "The Pittsburgh Kid," whose attempt to capture heavyweight glory against Joe Louis became one of boxing's most famous near-misses. Conn, who relinquished the light heavyweight title to challenge the "Brown Bomber," carried the hopes of those who believed that speed, skill and boxing intelligence could triumph over physical might.

For 12 rounds, Conn proved the believers right. Giving away 25 pounds to Louis, Conn boxed brilliantly, using his superior hand speed and footwork to outmaneuver the heavyweight KO artist. By the end of the 12th round, Conn was leading on the scorecards and appeared destined to become the first light heavyweight champion in boxing history to capture the heavyweight crown.

But then came the 13th round, and with it a lesson in both human nature and boxing's cruel realities. Unable to resist the temptation to go for the knockout that seemed within reach, Conn abandoned the tactical boxing that had served him so well and engaged Louis in a toe-to-toe battle. The result was swift and brutal. Louis unleashed a methodical battering that left Conn unconscious on the canvas, his dreams of heavyweight glory extinguished by his own ambition.

"I lost my head and a million bucks," Conn would later tell reporters, a quote that became part of boxing folklore. When asked why he went for the knockout, his response was equally memorable: "What's the use of being Irish if you can't be thick?"

Louis KO 13.

Joey Maxim vs. Sugar Ray Robinson

June 25, 1952, Yankee Stadium, The Bronx, New York

Eleven years later, a friend of Joe Louis would attempt to capture light heavyweight glory by taking on the bigger man. By 1952, Sugar Ray Robinson had embodied and popularized the term "pound-for-pound," already establishing himself as perhaps the greatest fighter in history by dominating both the welterweight and middleweight divisions with a combination of speed, power and boxing artistry that few have ever matched.

When Robinson challenged light heavyweight champion Joey Maxim, he was attempting to become the first welterweight champion in boxing history to win the 175-pound crown. Robinson famously stated that "rhythm is everything in boxing." For 10 rounds, it appeared that his brilliant footwork and combination punching would carry him to victory. He outboxed Maxim consistently, scoring with beautiful jabs to the head and body, with ringside observers claiming that Robinson was landing at will.

But this fight took place on one of the hottest days in New York City history, with temperatures in the ring soaring above 105 degrees Fahrenheit. The heat became an additional opponent that Robinson couldn't outbox. Despite building a commanding lead, his virtuoso performance came at a cost: He was expending far more energy than his opponent, using constant movement, throwing more punches and grappling with the extra weight of Maxim in the clinches.

MAXIM vs. ROBINSON

As the fight progressed into the late rounds, the combination of heat and exhaustion took its toll. In the 12th round, Robinson landed a crisp right hand that jolted Maxim's head back; this would be Sugar Ray's last effective punch of the fight. In the 13th round, the pound-for-pound king unraveled. Robinson's legs had turned to rubber. He fought on pure instinct, throwing wild punches out of desperation and clinging to Maxim whenever he got close. Near the end of the round, he fell flat on his face after missing wildly with a right hand, and by the bell, he was searching helplessly for his corner.

Robinson couldn't answer the bell for the 14th round, marking the only time in over 200 professional contests that he would lose inside the distance. It was later discovered that Robinson had lost 16 pounds during the fight, a testament to the toll taken by his attempt to overcome the bigger man.

Maxim TKO 13.

The tales of Conn's and Robinson's near-misses are particularly compelling because both fighters possessed the precise attributes many believed could neutralize their bigger opponents. Conn's lightning-fast hands and magnificent boxing ability had earned widespread respect throughout the boxing community. Former Ring Magazine editor Nat Loubet observed that Conn was "probably the fanciest and best boxer that boxing had seen in a long time. There were very few fighters that were as clever as he was." This wasn't mere hype. Prior to facing Louis, he had defeated seven heavyweights, stopping five of them, including Bob Pastor, who had managed to go the full 10 rounds with an up-and-coming Brown Bomber.

Robinson's case was equally persuasive to those who believed superior skill could triumph over size. Recognized as a once-in-a-generation talent, Sugar Ray was seen as a complete fighter who could box, punch, move and adapt to any style or situation. He possessed what many considered the perfect combination of speed, power and ring intelligence. Given Robinson's dominance through the first 10 rounds against Maxim, one cannot help but wonder whether the unprecedented heat that night was the decisive factor or whether it merely accelerated the inevitable. Ultimately we are left to accept the reality that punching a bigger man is a heavy burden.

Joe Frazier vs. Bob Foster

November 18, 1970, Cobo Arena, Detroit

Another stark cautionary tale of what happens when elite light heavyweights face elite heavyweights occurred in 1970 when Bob Foster was demolished by Joe Frazier. Foster had ruled the light heavyweight division since 1968, using long levers, a deadly left hook, jolting jab and fluid upper body movement that left his opponents punching thin air.

When Foster challenged Frazier for the heavyweight championship, he was a prime KO artist with a 41-4 (35 KOs) record. Frazier, undefeated at 25-0 (22 KOs), was also at his peak, fresh off of claiming the WBA and WBC titles against Jimmy Ellis and now wearing the Ring belt vacated by Muhammad Ali. What followed was a brutal lesson in the realities of weight classes.

Frazier came out aggressively from the opening bell, immediately establishing his physical dominance. In the second round, his famous left hook did its devastating work, sending Foster crashing to the canvas with a thunderous blow to the jaw. Foster rose, only to be dropped again by another vicious left hand. This time, he couldn't beat the count, the fight ending just 49 seconds into the second round.

The aftermath was almost as telling as the fight itself. Foster, still dazed and disoriented, sat in his dressing room and began putting his boxing boots back on, believing he was preparing for a fight that had already ended.

Although Foster was a light heavyweight champion, held the distinction for six years and defended his titles 14 times, his record clearly demonstrates he couldn't compete against elite heavyweights. Before facing Frazier, he had already suffered defeats to Ernie Terrell and Zora Folley, and two years after Frazier he'd get knocked out by Ali.

Frazier KO 2.

FRAZIER vs. FOSTER

Aaron Pryor vs. Alexis Arguello

November 12, 1982, Orange Bowl, Miami

Aaron Pryor's victories over Alexis Arguello in the early 1980s are yet another example of how moving up in weight can negate even the most exceptional talents. Arguello entered their first encounter having already dominated in three different weight classes – featherweight, junior lightweight and lightweight – and was seeking to become the first boxer ever to win world titles in four divisions.

Arguello possessed everything a fighter could want: devastating knockout power, sublime boxing technique and championship experience. He was suave, sophisticated and had garnered universal admiration from both the boxing community and media. Against Pryor, however, these attributes weren't enough.

In their encounter, billed as "The

Battle of the Champions," a pattern quickly emerged that would define both this fight and the rematch: Pryor charged at Arguello with combinations while Arguello stood in the center of the ring, attempting to counter. For much of the fight, this strategy worked, with Arguello having success in rounds 9 through 11 – particularly in the 11th, when he tagged Pryor with several hard shots.

But in the 14th round, Pryor unleashed a brutal assault that sent Arguello staggering to the ropes. There, Pryor landed nearly 20 unanswered punches in a sequence so violent it almost ejected Arguello from the ring. The proud Nicaraguan refused to go down, but referee Stanley Christodoulou mercifully stopped the fight.

The fight was later tainted by controversy surrounding a mysterious water bottle given to Pryor by trainer Panama Lewis, but the rematch 10 months later followed a similar pattern, with Pryor winning by 10th-round knockout in another exciting contest. Arguello retired after the second bout, with his dream of four-division glory remaining unfulfilled.

Pryor TKO 14.

Errol Spence Jr. vs. Mikey Garcia

March 16, 2019, AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas

A more recent example of the smaller man falling short was when Mikey Garcia, who'd just unified two lightweight titles, challenged Errol Spence Jr. for the IBF welterweight belt. Many believed Garcia's technical proficiency and ring intelligence could overcome Spence's size and strength advantages.

Garcia entered the fight as a proven champion with world titles in four weight classes. His technical skills were beyond question, and his ability to adapt and overcome had been demonstrated repeatedly throughout his career. Against Spence, however, these qualities were simply not enough.

Spence completely dominated Garcia from the opening bell, using his superior reach to constantly land jabs to the head and body while Garcia struggled to close the distance effectively. When Garcia did manage to get in range, Spence used his weight and height advantages to control the fight there as well. In rounds 8 and 9 alone, Spence landed over 100 punches, constantly using lead hooks and uppercuts against an increasingly defenseless Garcia.

Despite showing tremendous heart and making it to the final bell, Garcia was thoroughly outclassed, losing every round on all three judges' scorecards by scores of 120-107, 120-108 and 120-108.

Spence UD 12.

The advantages enjoyed by naturally bigger fighters are numerous and significant.

Superior strength allows bigger fighters to impose their will in clinches, wear down smaller opponents through physical pressure and absorb punishment that might devastate lighter fighters.

Greater reach is often a factor, as it allows a boxer to control distance more effectively, but it is worth noting that Crawford has the longer arms in this case.

When both participants possess elite-level technique, conditioning and ring intelligence, physical advantages often become the deciding factors. The smaller fighter must not only be significantly better technically but must also maintain that technical superiority throughout an entire fight while dealing with accumulated damage and fatigue.

As Crawford prepares to face Canelo, he carries with him not only his own ambitions but the weight of boxing history. His superlative technical skills and championship pedigree have earned him recognition as one of the sport's elite practitioners. However, history suggests that these qualities, impressive as they are, may not be sufficient to overcome the fundamental challenges posed by facing a naturally bigger opponent.

Canelo's best days may have been at middleweight, but his success at super middleweight speaks for itself.

The question facing Crawford is whether he can succeed where fighters like Conn, Robinson, Foster, Arguello and Garcia could not. Can he find a way to neutralize Canelo's size and strength advantages while imposing his own technical game plan?

The allure of such challenges is part of what makes boxing compelling, the possibility that craft and determination might overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. When Crawford steps through the ropes to face Canelo, he'll be carrying the hopes of those who believe that boxing skill can triumph over natural physical advantages.

However, while listing the failures of those who dared to challenge bigger men, it's essential to acknowledge that the two fighters who share the pound-for-pound summit alongside Crawford have accomplished precisely what so many others could not. Naoya Inoue's remarkable journey from junior flyweight to junior featherweight, capturing undisputed championships at both 118 and 122 pounds, has been a triumph of skills over size (with the help of outsized punching power), but The Monster is now facing his own limitations as he ponders a move to 126 pounds. Meanwhile, Oleksandr Usyk's achievement of moving from undisputed cruiserweight champion to undisputed heavyweight champion stands as perhaps the most compelling modern example of superior boxing skill conquering size advantages. Both Inoue and Usyk serve as shining examples of what becomes possible when the sweet science is truly mastered.

Whether Canelo-Crawford becomes a story of remarkable achievement against overwhelming odds or another reminder of the sport's harsh realities remains to be seen. What is certain is that Crawford's attempt to capture super middleweight glory will be measured against the long line of great fighters who have tried and failed to overcome similar challenges, and in doing so, it will add another layer to boxing's rich tapestry of triumph and heartbreak. RING

The Contrarian

HISTORY MIGHT SUGGEST THAT **TERENCE CRAWFORD** IS FACING AN UNLIKELY WIN — BUT GUESS HOW MUCH CRAWFORD CARES ABOUT THAT SUGGESTION

By Corey Erdman

It's hard to get boxing fans to agree on much of anything; by nature, they can be as diverse and combative as the athletes they watch in the ring. Reasonable people disagree on the daily when it comes to the talent level of a given fighter or the difficulty of a given fight. But one thing observers seem to universally understand is that moving up in weight successfully is both a difficult and impressive thing to do.

Boxing as a sport provides more room for subjectivity than almost any other. Provided a fighter isn't knocked out, scorecards are simply a subjective view of three neutral observers, meaning a large portion of boxing matches are open for interpretation. There is no league structure, and more and more, the sport's elite fight on a semiannual basis, making the amount of quantitative data minimal. However, everyone understands that fighting a person bigger than you is a genuine challenge, even when a skill gap exists.

Mikey Williams

(Left) The great Henry Armstrong was the ultimate weight-division sorcerer.

Thankfully, there is quantitative data to support *that*. Even in an era where records pertaining to titles are being broken with some regularity, thanks to the preponderance of titles and modern sports science, fighters who have won world titles in multiple weight classes are still exceedingly rare. While hundreds of thousands of people have participated in professional boxing since the dawn of the Queensberry Rules, only 56 male fighters have won titles in three weight classes. That number drops to 24 in terms of four-division champs and gets whittled down to five quintuple titleholders, two sextuple champs and one octuple champion: recent Hall of Fame inductee Manny Pacquiao.

Presently, there are 17 weight classes in men's boxing, with an additional underpublicized weight class, atomweight, in the women's ranks. In terms of male competitors, four sanctioning body belts and one Ring championship are available in each weight class. Multi-divisional champions are more common in the sport's lightest weight classes, where fighters can often scoop up titles quickly from 105 to 112, but become far less common as the numbers get higher on the scale. Divisional climbs most often happen because a fighter's body has grown and it is no longer healthy to make their previous weight, if at all. Sometimes they happen out of sheer opportunism, because a fighter notices a neighboring weight class housing a champion they feel they can pick off even with a natural size disadvantage.

This context is necessary for understanding the rarity, but also the gravity of what Terence Crawford is looking to accomplish against Canelo Alvarez. Crawford is already a four-division champion, holding titles at 135, 140, 147 and, most recently, 154. Although Crawford looked and seemed comfortable at junior middleweight, he certainly was not bursting at the seams physically. His targeting of Canelo Alvarez at 168 pounds is not a pursuit of convenience for the sake of a vanity title. It's taking aim at a generational great, one who has shared the pound-for-pound list with him for years, and being willing to undergo a full-blown body recomposition to complete the mission.

If Crawford prevails, it would be a historically significant victory, not only in terms of the magnitude of the event and the wattage of the stars involved, but for more granular reasons as well. It would make him the sixth five-division beltholder ever, and also a four-division Ring Magazine champion, the first fighter to accomplish that feat.

As many things in boxing and sports in general can, the history of championship-level weight climbing can be traced back to George Dixon. Dixon, the sport's first Black world champion (and first Black world champion of any sport), captured the bantamweight title in 1890, then became the first multi-weight champion by defeating Fred Johnson for the featherweight title in 1892.

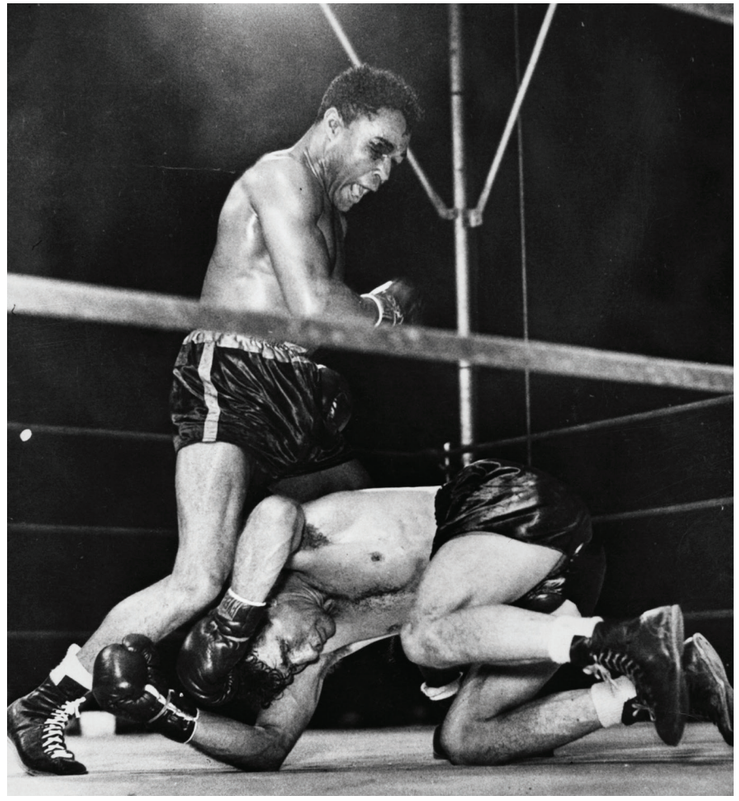
The larger Madrimov gave Crawford a stern test before losing on points.

There is a reasonable debate to be had as to whether the first three-weight world champion should be considered Dixon's conqueror, Terry McGovern, or Bob Fitzsimmons. McGovern won the bantamweight title in 1899 with a first-round knockout victory over Pedlar Palmer, the first time a first-round KO had ever taken place in a championship bout under the Queensberry Rules, which had been published 32 years earlier. He then knocked out Dixon to win the featherweight title in January of the following year, before jumping to lightweight to stop reigning champion Frank Erne. The bout was not an official title bout, so while some reporters declared McGovern the champion, Erne held on to the title and continued to defend it until losing to Joe Gans two years later.

In Fitzsimmons' case, there was no dispute, as he won the middleweight crown in 1892, the heavyweight crown in a shocking knockout win over James J. Corbett in 1897, and then the light heavyweight crown in 1903, a rare occurrence in which a fighter retreats to a lower weight in order to pick up another title.

The gold standard for multi-weight success would come three decades later, when Henry Armstrong put together a stretch that is unlikely to be matched. Crawford in fact referred to a potential win over Canelo as "some Henry Armstrong-type stuff" in a recent interview with The Ring's Manouk Akopyan. As monumental as a win over Canelo would be, the modern landscape couldn't allow for the run Armstrong enjoyed in 1937 and 1938, even if a current fighter wanted to attempt it. In 1937, Armstrong won 27 bouts, 26 of them by knockout. Six of those victims were rated inside the Top 10, and one was the reigning featherweight champion, Petey Sarron. The next year, Armstrong won 14 more fights, including wins over three of the greatest to ever lace up a pair of gloves: Barney Ross for the welterweight title, Lou Ambers for the lightweight title and Baby Arizmendi in a non-title bout – a forgotten contender in the enduring "greatest Mexican fighter of all time" debate.

Even Armstrong would reach his limits, however, coming up short via controversial draw against Ceferino Garcia in a bid for a fourth divisional title at middleweight (though it should be noted that the "world title" on the line was recognized by California only). Other greats have lost in more spectacular fashion in their brave attempts, such as Stanley Ketchel's walloping from Jack Johnson, Billy Conn's knockout losses to Joe Louis at heavyweight and Bob Foster's knockout defeats at the hands of Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali.



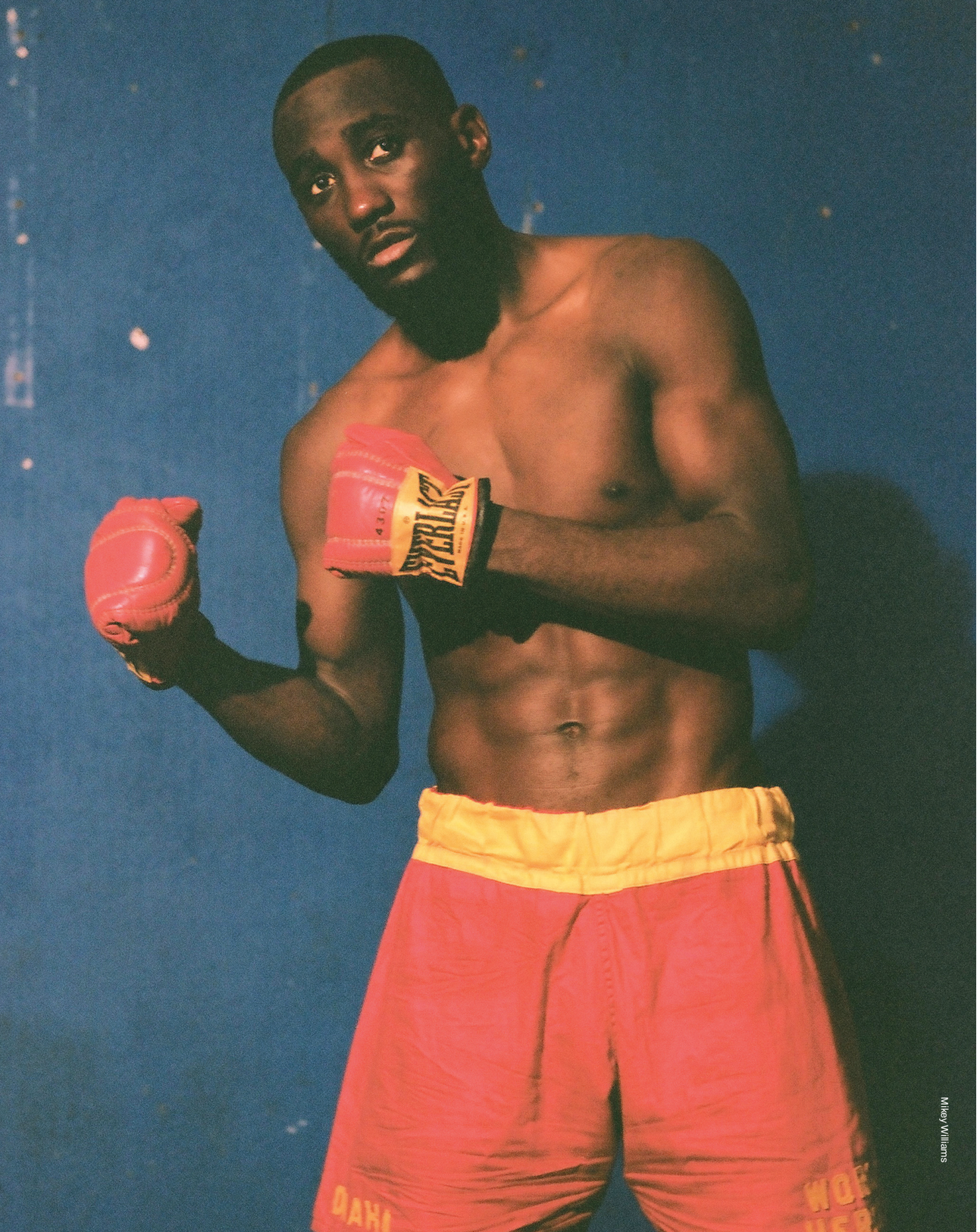
Armstrong knocks down Lew Jenkins at the Polo Grounds in 1940.

Mark Robinson

As training methods and dietary knowledge evolved over the years, the number of multi-weight champions went up. Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns each have a divisional title for every weekday, growing over time from sinewy welterweights to much bigger fighters while carrying their power up in weight. Their era set the precedent that was followed by Oscar De La Hoya, Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao, who were able to chase – and in some cases "overmarinate" – compelling and marketable foes as they gradually moved up the scale.

It's important to consider how primitive sports science was even in the heydays of Leonard and Hearns, but particularly in the eras before them. Archie Moore, notorious for moving up and down the scale, though generally out of both convenience and indulgence, would subsist mainly on a diet of sauerkraut liquid and the juices from steak – he would chew and spit out the bulk of the meat – for four weeks in order to crash himself into a given weight. Moore preached things we now understand to be important for body recomposition, like calorie counting and adequate sleep, but the extravagant dieting measures published alongside them in The Archie Moore Story were also well-received at the time.

Perhaps the first instance of a modern training system for moving a fighter up in weight was seen in 1985 as Michael Spinks prepared to move up to heavyweight to challenge lineal champion Larry Holmes. Just three months prior to that fight, Spinks had defended his 175-pound crown weighing well under the division limit. Spinks'



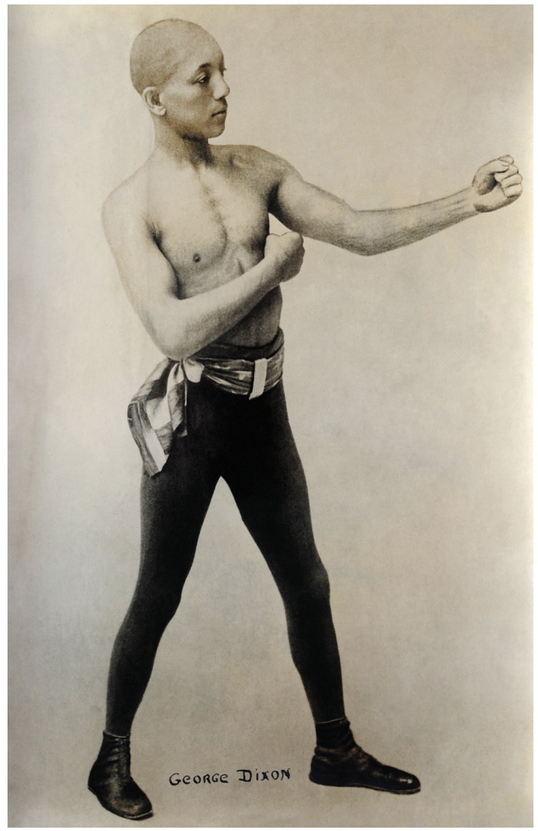
Mikey Williams

nutritionist and conditioning coach, Mackie Shilstone, devised a highly specific plan that cut down Spinks' lengthy roadwork, increased his weight training and explosive movements, and targeted a fighting weight of a maximum of 203 pounds at 7.1% body fat. Nutritionally, Spinks ate 4,500 calories with 65% from carbs, 20% from protein and 15% from fats. In modern times, this sounds quite standard, but in 1985, it was scoffed at by even the most revered of boxing's intelligentsia.

"Nutrition sucks. Wind sprints suck too. And if I catch a fighter of mine near a weight room, he better be able to take a baseball bat to the head," legendary trainer Angelo Dundee told Sports Illustrated's Pat Putnam when asked about Shilstone's plan for Spinks.

Spinks would go on to beat Holmes twice, and Shilstone would become one of the leading voices in the high-performance industry, eventually having a hand in extending the careers of Serena Williams and Peyton Manning. However, even science loses out to Father Time and the forces of nature, as Spinks would be crushed in one round by Mike Tyson in the final bout of his career.

But perhaps the best example of the pitfalls of weighty ambition can come from Crawford's upcoming opponent himself. In 2022, Canelo ventured up to light heavyweight to face then-WBA titleholder Dmitry Bivol. Contemporary reaction to the bout at the time suggested that Alvarez had chosen Bivol because he seemed like a weak titleholder and an easy way to stuff another trinket in his trophy case in Guadalajara. History has been kind to Canelo in that sense, as it turned out that Bivol was one of the trickiest opponents anyone could choose at any weight. The future Ring light heavyweight champion nullified most of Alvarez's offense and kept him at the end of his technically perfect blows for 12 rounds, silencing the crowd in Las Vegas and shocking the bookmakers who'd instilled Bivol as a heavy underdog.



Dixon made boxing history at the turn of the 20th century.

Alvarez, like Foster before him, regrouped and went on to produce more stellar performances and history-making achievements, never once suggesting that the Bivol fight was anywhere near the end of the road for him.

In Crawford's case, the Omaha native has expressed his intent to retire soon and at various times has suggested he was comfortable staying out of the ring unless it was for the biggest fight possible – this one. In terms of "daring to be great" scenarios, going all-in for what's potentially your last fight is as audacious and laudable as it gets.

Crawford's decision to leap up two weight classes to challenge Canelo toward – or maybe at – the end of his career is one born of circumstance but also necessity to satisfy a notoriously competitive soul. The colossal payday and promotional gap-bridging by Turki Alalshikh provided the resources to make the fight possible. However, the final act of Crawford's career has been as much about making up for lost time and proving a long-insisted point as it has about banking generational wealth.

For the bulk of his career, Crawford was promoted by Top Rank, and through no fault of his own, was sequestered from many of the contemporaries who the fan base wanted to see him fight. He fought, and dominated, the opposition available and became a fighter whose talent and exposure through the ESPN vehicle outpaced the name recognition on his resume. Ultimately, he and Errol Spence Jr. made a fight happen, and the questions about what would have happened if Crawford had fought any of the welterweights of the same era were resoundingly answered.

But there's always been another contemporary alongside him in the pound-for-pound list, which is itself a kind of exercise in weight-jumping, built on fantasy and powered by debate. Part of that debate would be silenced by a win over Canelo, though another conversation would likely grow louder: the one about where Crawford ranks among the legends who risked it all before him. RING

... STAYS IN VEGAS

Headlining in Las Vegas for the first time, Terence Crawford put his WBO 140-pound title on the line against WBC counterpart Viktor Postol at the MGM Grand Garden Arena on July 23, 2016. In a battle of unbeatens, Crawford was superior throughout, flooring the Ukrainian twice in Round 5 before cruising to a lopsided unanimous decision that earned him the Ring Magazine junior welterweight belt. Just over a year later, Crawford would become undisputed champion at 140 pounds. The long-awaited superfight with fellow pound-for-pound entrant Canelo Alvarez will mark the sixth time that Crawford has fought in a main event on The Strip.

Steve Marcus

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